Mission to Help: A Post-Colonial Analysis of UMC Mission Trips as a Form of Voluntourism

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Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which the United Methodist Church's (UMC) short-term mission trips navigate their work and relationships with host communities in Latin America. International Relations has historically neglected religious phenomena and their impacts on politics and development; however, this work attempts to examine how short-term mission trips are representative of micro-level interaction of development. The data was collected through interviews with mission trip leaders who conduct trips from the United States to Latin America. The themes discussed include the importance and meaning of community and the ways in which implicit and explicit evangelism function during these trips. This thesis also examines the neo-colonial understandings that mission leaders hold and how the UMC and mission leaders respond to such critiques. A story of reciprocity emerges between the hosts and volunteers demonstrating that both hosts and volunteers benefit from such trips, albeit in differing ways. Understanding short-term mission trips and how the leaders of such trips portray and think about their work remains important as voluntourism and mission trips continue to garner public support and participation. Through an understanding of the politics of the everyday, the individuals on these trips play a role in both subverting and reinforcing existing neo-colonial power structures.

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List of Abbreviations:

GBGM – General Board of Global Ministries

IR – International Relations

LDC – Lesser Developed Countries

LDS – The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

PSR – Personal Social Responsibility

SPRC – Staff Parish Relations Committee

UMC – United Methodist Church

UMCOR – United Methodist Committee on Relief

UMVIM – United Methodist Volunteers in Mission

VBS – Vacation Bible School

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Introduction:

The current trend of "voluntourism" (a portmanteau of "volunteer" and "tourism")[1] continues to attract young, well-meaning individuals from the Global North to spend their spring breaks and summer vacations exploring and "aiding" the Global South. These trips range from building houses to teaching English to doling out vaccines at local clinics, with the volunteers only rarely being qualified to do such tasks. The trips are short, lasting only a few days to a few weeks. In the literature, there is some suggestion that there is a difference between voluntourism and development volunteering, with voluntourism generally taking place over days to weeks and development volunteering being more long-term taking place over months or years.[2] The young people, that these trips generally attract, feel that they are doing good in the world, but self-held perceptions of the volunteers themselves often do not match up with the reality on the ground for a variety of reasons.

Although not always the case, many of these voluntourism trips are led by Christian religious groups, and while they generally do not incorporate evangelism, their religious affiliation does play a role. The history of these religious "mission" trips goes back much further than the current fads associated with the advent of voluntourism in the 21ˢᵗ century. The work done on mission trips and voluntourism trips is often similar types of work: construction, teaching and medical care. However, this religious element to the mission trips becomes especially important when considering that, although mission work and diaconian work are explicitly separate, there is often indirect overlap.[3] This overlap can be seen in the motivations for completing altruistic work, as well as the types of work

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[1] "Voluntourism | Definition of Voluntourism by Merriam-Webster."
[2] McGloin and Georgeou, "'Looks Good on Your CV.'"
[3] Tønnessen, "Faith-Based NGOs in International Aid."

being chosen by these church groups. For instance, religious organizations will frequently avoid more "taboo" topics or focus on educational activities, which may have Christian motifs.[4]

Although many multilateral institutions underestimate religious organizations effects on development, local and national governments have continually partnered with religious organizations, even during times of increased secularism; these partnerships are often an attempt to widen the reach of development initiatives.[5] During the 1960's, several Christian denominations started to work together to lead service-oriented mission trips, demonstrating a focus on development, relief and aid, as opposed to earlier goals of evangelism.[6]

Moreover, the transition away from traditional views on missionary work and a move towards service-oriented mission trips started to occur during the 1960's when many secular volunteering organizations such as the Peace Corps were founded.[7] This change was also spurred by the increase in government-funded development projects, which built upon the momentum and success of such programs. This shift towards emphasizing micro-level interactions of development has led to recent successes of voluntourist initiatives.

Selecting a Christian group as a basis for this thesis is not without reason. For over a hundred years, church missions have been directly affecting development in the Global South both through civilizing missions and religious ones. The history of the Salvation Army, an off shoot of the Methodist Church, is a good example showing that some of the earliest instances of development work were fundamentally Christian.[8] The concept of development was in some ways born out of previously held conceptions such as "the white man's burden" and other "civilizing" missions. These civilizing

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[4] Sidibé, "Religion and Sustainable Development."

[5] Cochrane, "Religion in Sustainable Development."; Evan Berry, "Religion and Sustainability in Global Civil Society: Some Basic Findings from Rio+20."

[6] Brouwer, "When Missions Became Development."

[7] Brouwer. 661.

[8] Fischer-Tiné, "Global Civil Society and the Forces of Empire: The Salvation Army, British Imperialism, and the 'Prehistory' of NGOs (ca. 1880–1920)."

missions aimed to change the culture of those in former colonies to be more reflective of Western European culture, which was achieved through conversions, education and other colonial policies.[9] It is important to note how these modern day instances of church-led "development" exist in a world where development as a practice has been secularized. This secularization of development shows the uncomfortable place in which short-term mission trips exist: not quite part of development discourse but not wholly outside of it.

When discussing "help," it is important to understand and examine what it signifies. What is helpful to a community in the Global South is often defined by a Western lens despite what locals want and need. The justifications made by churches from the developed world for spending vast amounts of money to travel to the Global South to do volunteer work, when that money could be spent more wisely and more effectively in their own home communities, is partially what allows these organizations to continue to thrive. The diaconian concept of helping those as a basis for church activity is frequently noted as one of the motivations for such non-missionary related, development work completed by churches.[10] Additionally, when talking about voluntourism, there is the self-gratification that volunteers feel for helping others, which leads to the critiques that trips such as this are doing more harm than good[11]. In the context of religious trips, there is the added complexity of receiving religiously perceived benefits in the eyes of God by following a religious mandate to help, which also harkens back to this issue of who these types of trips are designed to benefit.

The question about the reciprocity of help, shows how volunteers help the hosts in a physical manner and hosts help to transform volunteers' worldviews. Despite mission volunteer trips' effectiveness or ineffectiveness in creating long-term developmental change in the Global South, such trips exist as part of the current regime of development, and therefore questions like these must be

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[9] Liebersohn, "Introduction: The Civilizing Mission."
[10] Tønnessen, "Faith-Based NGOs in International Aid"; "Connecting The Church In Mission | Global Ministries."
[11] Rosenberg, "The Business of Voluntourism"; Jakubiak, "Ambiguous Aims."

addressed. By using the local host communities as a reflective lens, the volunteers politicize the trips by reinforcing neo-colonial structures which allow the extractive nature of these trips to proliferate and prioritized volunteer transformation over effectiveness of aid. These trips serve as a form of micro-level development practice, and although there has been previous research about evangelizing trips and secular voluntourism trips, there is a lacuna in research about these types of non-evangelizing, development-oriented trips, conducted by church groups. Looking not only at the current literature regarding voluntourism but also the relation between Christianity and the development field's inception, it is important to continue to examine the ways in which Christianity continues to effect development, especially in innovative ways such as this.

This thesis aims to answer the question: What are the ways in which the design, practice and lived experiences of mission trips contribute to the power relationships of structures of development? Through the examination of United Methodist Church (UMC) mission trips, I explore the relationships that these trips have with development as well as the place that they occupy within the understanding of voluntourism. Additionally, I seek to address the question: How do mission leaders of the UMC navigate and negotiate their positionality in light of their awareness of post-colonial critiques? I use theories and academic work from the fields of post-development studies, post-colonial studies and tourism studies to center my critique and analysis of the data collected through interviews with these mission trip leaders.

Using interviews conducted during the summer of 2019, I have found three themes that require specialized analysis. The first of these is the use of community-building both in the home communities and with the host communities; this is especially important, because the leaders believe their trips to be different from secular ones due to the yearly or biyearly return to the same host community. The second theme is the absence of overt evangelism and the presence of implicit

evangelism in the context of these trips. The third theme is the ideas of who these trips help, or sometimes hurt, as viewed by the trip leaders.

Through the three themes that I have highlighted, community-building, evangelism and the question of who these trips help, I demonstrate the presence of a reciprocal nature of help. This reciprocity is what allows leaders to justify the trips continuance despite critiques and distance themselves from secular voluntourism initiatives. As discussed in Chapter Three, the emphasis that the mission leaders place on community building both during and after the trips, shows one instance of this reciprocity. In Chapter Four, I examine how despite the UMC's prohibition on evangelism, there is still an unstated evangelism which depends on community relationships to thrive. Chapter Five handles the topics of how these trips go on to help—or hurt—the host communities by acknowledging the awareness that mission leaders and the UMC have of neo-colonial critiques of voluntourism and how the Church attempts to discuss race and culture in the context of mission. Chapter Five also discusses how leaders view these trips as important, as long as the volunteers are gaining transformative personal experiences. In the Conclusion, I synthesize my findings and reiterate the existing levels of reciprocity in the host-volunteer dynamic.

Chapter One: Academic Discourse & Literature

In this chapter, I will be discussing how post-colonial theory and post-development theory deal with the effects of power dynamics and global coloniality present in the Global South. Additionally, I will bring in viewpoints from religious studies and tourism academic discourses to strengthen the post-colonial critiques of voluntourism and mission in Latin America. This is an introduction to the theoretical viewpoints which informed and oriented my analysis of the data collected via the interview process presented in the following chapters.

1.1   Post-Colonialism

Post-colonialism as a discipline arose in the latter half of the 20th century to study the long-lasting effects colonialism had on the Global South. As this project handles the topic of church-led mission trips, the connection between colonial missionary activities and today's mission trips has garnered neo-colonial critiques due to mission trips' perceived positions as perpetuating colonial Anglo-American power structures and religion existing as a form of hegemonic culture.[12] Traditionally, Christianity has played a distinct role in colonialism, with missionaries working to spread Christianity as well as providing schooling, etc. Although the increase of education is often seen as an important step in the development process, historically, education has been tied with colonial structures in that the colonial powers were able to impose belief systems through Eurocentric educational systems. [13] This indoctrination worked to keep European thought systems at the top of the colonial hierarchy.

In the 19th century, colonialism changed its "motives" from a Christianizing mission, focusing on the spread of religion, to a civilizing mission. There is a misconception that civilizing and

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[12] Ntarangwi, "The Challenges of Education and Development in Post-Colonial Kenya." 218.
[13] Matikiti, "'We Know Our Africans.'"

Christianizing missions did not coexist.[14] However, many organizations who were involved in this type of service work were also critical of colonial governments' treatment of the local populace. For example, how the United Church of Canada was a frequent critic of Rhodesia and Angola's colonial practices.[15] The shift towards the service-oriented mission trips that are common today was partially motivated by an understanding that churches should distance themselves from their colonial pasts.[16]

Latin America occupies a unique position in post-colonial discourse due to Latin America's unclear position when it comes to the categorization of "less-developed" regions. This is due to the racialization of development, colonial histories and problematic naming systems.[17] This racialization of development has been further complicated by the racialization of the latinx identity, especially in the North American context of understanding of race and ethnicity, especially when considering interactions between American missioners and Latin American host communicates.[18] Due to Latin American countries gaining their independence during the 18th and 19th centuries, their colonial experiences varied greatly from those of African and Asian countries; however, this did not exclude them from experiencing neo-colonial power imbalances in recent decades or from the effects caused by global Anglo-European hegemonic presence and echoes of global coloniality.[19] This unique colonial history paired with racialization, places Latin America outside of many post-colonial discussions when it comes to development.

The language of development often alludes to a sort of parental relationship between the developed and developing world as a sort of "kinship politics," reminiscent of colonial understandings

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14 Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. 280.
15 Brouwer, "When Missions Became Development." 676.
16 Brouwer. 666.
17 Munck, "Global Sociology: Towards an Alternative Southern Paradigm."
18 Rumbaut, "Pigments of Our Imagination: On the Racialization and Racial Identities of 'Hispanics' and 'Latinos.'"
19 Munck, "Global Sociology: Towards an Alternative Southern Paradigm"; Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. 314.

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of the colonizers' duty to educate and lead their colonies into a state of civilizational maturity.[20] When looking at the volunteers' desire to not only do physical labor, but also to educate members of the host community, this kinship politics appear again on the micro-level. Such practices, therefore, demonstrate how micro-interactions, i.e. person-to-person relations, of development link back to colonialism by allowing the Global North to "domina[te], restructure[e] and hav[e] authority over the underdeveloped world."[21]

The positionality of volunteers is also important when analyzing micro-level instances of international relations and development. Volunteers often take on the identity of "volunteer," positioning themselves in opposition to the "others" whom they assist.[22] This creation of an in-group, out-group distinction made by the volunteers and leaders further informs the viewpoint, which these volunteers hold, that places them at the top of the hierarchy. This position as the giver of assistance and educator demonstrates a relation to modernization-as-development theories which place the Anglo-European culture and society at the top of the social pyramid. Additionally, education levels of such volunteers does little to lessen the neo-colonial issues associated with voluntourism trips; rather, for real changes to occur there must be a restructuring to allow for greater amount of agency from the host communities.[23] Without a structural change to these programs, they continue to mirror existing power imbalances between the Global North and Global South that can be seen in state-level development work. This is replicated on the micro-level through their understanding of their position as volunteer. The role of volunteer and the role of Christian overlap in that both require service for

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[20] Bandyopadhyay and Patil, "'The White Woman's Burden' – the Racialized, Gendered Politics of Volunteer Tourism." 650

[21] Omar, "Rethinking Development from a Postcolonial Perspective." 47

[22] Palacios, "Volunteer Tourism, Development and Education in a Postcolonial World: Conceiving Global Connections beyond Aid." 867

[23] McGloin and Georgeou, "'Looks Good on Your CV.'" 414

the benefit of the community, while allowing the individual to gain personal benefits from their service.[24]

1.2   Post-Development

The field of development studies has undergone a transformation as development's importance has been called into question due to increased post-colonial critiques. Critical work regarding development is called either anti-development or post-development, and for this thesis I have elected to use the term post-development because of its more prominent usage in the field. Development was born of the Enlightenment ideal of progress, which lead to the popularization of "modernization-as-development."[25] This modernization has, however always been intimately linked with an Anglo-European understanding of what civilization entails, wherein hegemonic European civilizational and cultural ideals are viewed as the zenith of development.

Since development efforts historically created categories viewed as acceptable by the Global North, such as aid or technology transfers, which persist, regardless of whether these actions are appropriate for the context. This has led to backlash and the movement away from development studies, which focused on the development-as-modernization approach to post-development initiatives, which are often born from the subaltern. Both post-colonialism and post-development studies are critical of Western hegemony and current structures of cultural hegemony.[26] The move to "decolonize development" in recent years has been exceedingly important as we recognize the issues raised by increasing neo-coloniality and structures of dominance reminiscent of the colonial era. This

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[24] Lindsey et al., "Why People Volunteer:"
[25] Omar, "Rethinking Development from a Postcolonial Perspective." 43
[26] Kapoor, *The Postcolonial Politics of Development*. 17.

rise of neo-coloniality is seen especially in political economy research regarding the increased ties between development aid, FDI and North-South power imbalances.[27]

In the move to decolonize development, there has been a shift in the linguistics of development discourse. Categories such as "developing," "underdeveloped," and "undeveloped" project and solidify western standards as to what "developed" looks like.[28] Similarly, the term "Third World" harkens back to the beginning of the post-colonial era and is inherently problematic in the way that it requires the Third World (and less frequently mentioned Second World) to define themselves exclusively in relation to the First World.[29] In recent years, terms such as Global South and Global North have become popularized in post-development discourse as alternatives to the East-West and undeveloped-developed dichotomies. This categorization creates particular problems when discussing Latin America because of its unique position within the Global South due to the difference in colonial ties present there.[30] However, throughout this thesis, I have elected to use Global South, as it is indicative of a move away from the idea of development as a linear path towards modernization and more reflective of current understandings of global divisions based on an "emphasis on geopolitical relations of power."[31] The importance of acknowledging this relationship to power harkens back to the image of "coloniality of power," which allows the Global North to define institutions, set development goals and agendas, and classify/re-classify areas of the world into categories.[32]

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[27] de Arimatéia da Cruz and Stephens, "The U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM)"; Malhotra, "The Axis Of Neo-Colonialism"; Mawere and Tandi, "'A New Form of Imperialism?' Interrogating China-Africa Relations and Development Prospects in Africa."

[28] Bandyopadhyay and Patil, "'The White Woman's Burden' – the Racialized, Gendered Politics of Volunteer Tourism."

[29] "Chapter 6: 'The Third World' as an Element in the Collective Construction of a Post-Colonial European Identity 157"; Simon, "(Post)Development and Post-Colonialism: Separated by Common Ground?"

[30] Munck, "Global Sociology: Towards an Alternative Southern Paradigm."

[31] Dados and Connell, "The Global South." 1.

[32] Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. 17.

When thinking about religion in terms of development, traditional modernization theories often assumed that religion would phase out as a side-effect of the modernization process; however, religion persists as a part of society and development.[33] Christianity's effect on development did not end with colonial missionaries, especially now with over two-thirds of today's Christians living in the Global South.[34] With not only more churches being involved with macro-level development projects, churches have become increasingly involved with development on the micro-level. Other such micro-level interactions have included initiatives such as congregations' abilities to spread health interventions in the developing world.[35] Christianity's continued involvement in development has political implications due to the Christian worldview reinforcing structures such as capitalism and development.

1.3   Tourism Studies

The recent boom in tourism, and specifically voluntourism, in recent years demonstrates the increasingly globalized world of today and need for sustainability.[36] After the end of the Cold War, there was an expansion in geographical options for tourism and a shift in mentality away from pre-packaged resorts to a desire to explore "untouched" or "forbidden" regions of the world.[37] This forbidden nature can be seen in the locations chosen by mission leaders, such as Guatemala, Haiti and Nicaragua, which are all currently listed as Level 3 (Reconsider Travel) and Level 4 (Do Not Travel) on the US State Department website.[38] When it comes to mission trips, this allure of untouched,

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[33] Webster, "Development Advisors in a Time of Cold War and Decolonization: The United Nations Technical Assistance Administration, 1950-59"; Hurd, "Religious Resurgence."

[34] Ma, "The Role of Christian Women in the Global South." 195.

[35] Alio et al., "Capacity Building Among African American Faith Leaders to Promote HIV Prevention and Vaccine Research."

[36] Budeanu, "Impacts and Responsibilities for Sustainable Tourism."

[37] Lisle, *Holidays in the Danger Zone*. 182.

[38] "Travel Advisories."

forbidden travel is precipitated by the desire to do good. This becomes not only a motivator, but something that volunteers view as a sort of "badge of honor," allowing them to experience the authenticity they crave while travelling, while also justifying the cost of the trip.

Although mainstream IR typically examines macro-level interactions, recent research on the politics of everyday life addresses how although everyday life may seem apolitical, all actions are inherently political. This can be seen in the research into tourism as an incidence of micro-level international relations, as positionality of tourists works to reinforce individual understandings of the world and their place in it. This politics of the everyday is especially evident when discussing "dark tourism," which allows tourists to travel, tour and other communities outside of their own. Accounts addressing war tourism, such as hostel-based tours in Bosnia, and poverty tourism, such as favela tourism in Brazil, are examples of this surge in literature intersecting tourism and IR.[39] The use of theories on tourism and tourist positionality are employed throughout, but extensively in Chapter Five, while discussing the political implications of these trips and the relation of these trips to secular voluntourism.

Tourism is often touted as a positive step in development, in that it is often used as a tool to diversify and modernize local economies by giving smaller communities access to global funds. An example of this is tourism to Masai villages in Kenya, where tourist are able to tour traditional villages, buy handicrafts and experience "authenticity."[40] However, even though many rural indigenous communities are encouraged to expand tourism initiatives, there has also been significant post-colonial critiques of such endeavors, with allegations of the fetishization of indigenous culture and the reality

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[39] Freire-Medeiros, "The Favela and Its Touristic Transits"; Cumberlidge, "War Stories : How Do Hostel Owners Shape the Narrative of the 1992-5 Bosnian Conflict?"
[40] Bruner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Maasai on the Lawn: Tourist Realism in East Africa."

of such sites reflecting white, colonial expectations for profit.[41] This demonstrates how development's

focus on modernization overlooks and underestimates the way that tourism can reinforce neo-colonial

expectations of neediness and backwardsness.

As noted previously, the positionality of the tourist plays a huge role in the ways in which

individuals perform. The performance of a tourist is regulated by perceived boundaries both symbolic

and physical; the space of the voluntourist requires a specific understanding of their role in the

development process which others, for example those working as development practitioners or

tourists partaking in poverty tourism, may not have.[42] Additionally, it has been evidenced that the

gender, class and race of tourist does affect the way that they exist and interact as tourists within host

communities.[43]

The tourism industry as a whole has elicited criticism for its consumeristic tendencies. Other

sorts of "dark" tourisms have elicited critiques such as poverty pornography generally associated with

favela tourism.[44] These accounts of poverty tourism can be likened to the Orientalizing and

romanticizing of the experiences of those in the Global South, that can be seen in early travel writings

and now also in blogs and Instagram posts.[45] Additionally, voluntourism has previously been classified

as another type of poverty tourism by scholars.[46] So when looking at the UMC mission trips, special

attention must be paid to these trips as not only an alternative to tourism but also the possible

voyeuristic "dark" elements associated there within. These dark elements demonstrate how tourism

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[41] Mbaiwa, "Hosts & Guests:"; Schneider, "Tourism Development in Africa: Scope and Critical Issues"; Ferreira, "Problems Associated with Tourism Development in Southern Africa"; Bruner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Maasai on the Lawn: Tourist Realism in East Africa."
[42] Edensor, "Performing Tourism, Staging Tourism."
[43] Edensor, "Staging Tourism."
[44] Freire-Medeiros, "The Favela and Its Touristic Transits."
[45] Bandyopadhyay and Patil, "'The White Woman's Burden' – the Racialized, Gendered Politics of Volunteer Tourism."
[46] McGloin and Georgeou, "'Looks Good on Your CV.'" 407.

has in part led to a "deterritorialization of global politics," allowing for more direct interventions and involvement of the global in local politics.[47]

1.4   IR and Development Theories' Religious Nexus

Religion and politics have always been entangled to some degree. In states like the USA, where many mission trips originate from, there is a *de jure*, if not *de facto* separation of church and state. It can be difficult to define because although state and church are separated, there are many instances where religion plays a role in the societal, legal and political spheres.[48] It is important for IR to recognize this correlation, as it causes implications on both macro- and micro-level instances of IR and development. For example, on the macro-level, recent legislation banning sodomy in Uganda was encouraged and linked to funding for development aid provided by American Evangelical churches.[49] This thesis serves to examine such micro-level interactions of religiously motivated volunteers with host communities.

Religion is an integral part of development, with some of the first social and economic development initiatives being led by churches. In the period directly after the World War II, many organizations focusing on development believed that with the rise of secularity, religion's impact on development would diminish; however, in the current era of post-secularism, this has proven not to be the case due to continual existence of church-led initiatives in the Global South.[50] During the second half of the 20th century, there was a lack of institutional cooperation between multilateral development organizations and religious groups, and this continues in the limited research done on the effectiveness of church-led development initiatives.

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[47] Lisle, *Holidays in the Danger Zone*. 286.
[48] Davis, "Separation, Integration, and Accommodation: Religion and State in America in a Nutshell." 8.
[49] Williams, *God Loves Uganda*.
[50] Cochrane, "Religion in Sustainable Development." 89.

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IR has attempted to remain a secular discipline, despite the recent acceptance of religion and religious motivation by other disciplines.[51] IR theory has only recently embraced the Politics of Religion in IR.[52] IR theory traditionally viewed the sacred and secular as stable categorizations, with the sacred remaining an aspect of the "private" sphere.[53] Some have argued that it is even unfair to refer to the current era as "post-secular," noting that the relevance of religion never diminished to the extent that some scholars argue; the view of the current situation as a type of "return" demonstrates a misunderstanding between the relationship between modernity and religion.[54] Regardless, religion plays a significant role in society and culture but also specifically in global politics. This is particularly true when examining micro-level motivations. For example, in the world of secular voluntourism, even non-religious groups have coopted narratives regarding the "sacred" to persuade volunteers to take part in their trips.[55]

Religion has functioned as a hand of development as well. In the Global South, where welfare provisions by the state are largely absent or ineffective, the Church has stepped in to provide needed welfare services, such as food assistance, education, job training, etc.[56] Hasan also highlights the theological connections between Christianity and development, demonstrating such interpretations used by Protestants that encourage individuals to gain wealth.[57] Similarly, just as development is not an apolitical process, it is also not an irreligious one. Politicians in countries both sending and receiving aid have both political and religious motivations, albeit often unspoken.[58]

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[51] Blaga, "Rethinking Religion in International Relations"; Kubalkova, "A 'Turn to Religion' in International Relations?"; Hurd, "Religious Resurgence."
[52] Hasan, *Religion and Development in the Global South.*; Woodberry, "The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy"; Pasha, "The SAGE Handbook of the History, Philosophy and Sociology of International Relations"; Bettiza et al., "Teaching Religion and International Relations: Disciplinary, Pedagogical, and Personal Reflections."
[53] Hurd, "Religious Resurgence."
[54] Meyer, "Religious Sensations. Why Media, Aesthetics and Power Matter in the Study of Contemporary Religion." 704.
[55] Edles, "International Voluntourism as Secular Pilgrimage."
[56] Hasan, *Religion and Development in the Global South.* 192-3.
[57] Hasan. 116-120
[58] Hasan; Fountain, Bush, and Feener, "Religion and the Politics of Development."

The theories and discourse outlined here shape the analysis that I complete in the subsequent chapters. Mission trips exist at the intersection of tourism, IR and religious studies, but the work completed on the aforementioned trips is reminiscent of colonial endeavors taken on by the church. These trips are positioned uniquely among both post-colonial and post-development discourse due to the ways in which the volunteers perpetuate neo-colonial power structures and their positionality as volunteers on trips seeking to give aid to these host communities. The theories described thus far shape our understanding of the political understanding of mission trips as a form of development work and an act of politics of the mundane. In the following chapters, I am going to turn to these theories in order to glean a better understanding of the nature of these trips as a form of development and a reification of neo-colonial power structures.

Chapter Two: Methods & Data

2.1   Methodology

For the empirical portion of my research, I interviewed a member of the United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) leadership and six individual church mission trip leaders. I selected leaders due to their repeated experiences conducting trips, understanding of the planning and training processes and their responsibility to create successful trips. Through these interviews, I attempted to gain insight into motivations for these mission trips. I identified Paul, who works as a UMVIM Coordinator, as an individual who could put me in contact with mission trip leaders from across the US. Paul and I had been previously acquainted through connections at my family's church. Paul served as both an interviewee and an interlocuter who directed me to others within the organization to interview.[59] In addition to Paul, I interviewed six mission trip leaders from different regions of the US. These leaders are from both large and small churches, which were distributed throughout the Eastern half of the US. This distribution is partially caused by the fact that there are regional variations in mission trip destinations, as noted by Paul, with the East Coast tending to serve in Latin America and the West Coast serving in the South Pacific and Asia.

Throughout this project, I employed semi-structured interviews, where the interviewer has some questions but does not follow a strict schedule or order. This allowed me to stay on task, but also allowed for time and space for the interviewee to express thoughts that may have been missed in a structured interview.[60] While developing the interview questions and during the interview process, I utilized Weiss, Fuijii and Emerson as guiding texts for bringing in techniques of conversational and relational interviewing for IR research.[61] After conducting interviews, I gathered a set of recurrent

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[59] Fujii, *Relational Interviewing for Social Science Research*.
[60] Fujii.
[61] Weiss, *Learning from Strangers*; Fujii, *Relational Interviewing for Social Science Research*; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*.

themes that came up repeatedly throughout the process. I then analyzed and put them into a different perspective via the critical theory that I have chosen to employ—post-colonial and post-development theories.

In choosing the focus of this project, I elected to limit my research to include leaders who primarily conduct trips in Latin America (the Caribbean, South and Central America). This choice was intentional. Much of Latin America shares the same language (Spanish), same dominant religion (Catholicism) and similar colonial heritage.[62] This commonality in heritage allowed me to look more specifically at how these individuals perceived their work without having to account for large cultural differences in host communities. The interviewees lead trips to Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica (2), Panama, Haiti, Columbia and the Dominican Republic.

Figure 1: Mission Sites of Interviewees[63]

An additional choice made was choosing UMC as a case study. The first reason for choosing a religious organization and specifically a church, is that Christianity has historically held a prominent

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[62] "South America - Population and Ecological Distribution."
[63] Map created using mapchart.net website

position in development movements, and although the UMC was not tied closely to any colonizing efforts, some Methodist-affiliated organizations do have such ties.[64] The second reason is that the UMC, being the third largest denomination—and largest mainline denomination—in the US and one of the largest protestant denominations globally, provides a significant amount of development assistance worldwide and often partners with secular organizations for projects such as "Imagine No Malaria."[65] Additionally, there is a gap in the emerging field of voluntourism literature when it comes to religious organization and church participation in the developing world.

For the analysis of the data collected via the aforementioned interviews, I intend to use post-colonial and development theories to analyze the major recurring themes located there within. I chose to use post-colonial and post-development theories to examine these trips partially due to how previous literature on secular voluntourism trips has handled this topic (see Chapter One). Some might put forth that these mission trips serve as a type of neo-colonial structure, especially when looking at the close ties between European colonialism, Christianity and the developing world. Due to the colonial-era's roots in Christian ideology and linkages between Christianity and the prevalence of volunteering, it is evident that there is a possible connection between today's Christian mission trips and neo-colonial visions of reality. By looking at the UMC's "Volunteer's in Mission" segment of the organization, I examine how these trips hope to function as a type of development work. I accomplished this by asking the leaders whom I interviewed about the type of work that they do and how they view such work.

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[64] Fischer-Tiné, "Global Civil Society and the Forces of Empire: The Salvation Army, British Imperialism, and the 'Prehistory' of NGOs (ca. 1880–1920)."
[65] Communications, "Imagine No Malaria Campaign."

2.2   Data

I conducted interviews during August and September 2019, and most interviews were conducted via video-calling, while one interview occurred in person. The advantages of using video-calling was that I could interview individuals from a range of churches throughout the US' East Coast, but the limits of such interviews include the inability to fully understand the environment of the interviewee, etc.[66] I elected to do seven interviews because a level of data saturation was reached. The interviewees were informed of the research project, and names have been changed to obscure the identities of those interviewed for privacy's sake.

The questions in the interview handled several themes. The first theme was how the individual became involved with mission work in general. The second theme of interview dealt with the training that volunteers received, both linguistic and practical. During the longest segment of the interviews, I asked the interviewees about the trips themselves (i.e. location, length, teams, what they did on the ground, challenges encountered etc.). The last group of questions centered around the leaders' views on the role of religion during these trips. After the interviews were completed, they were then transcribed by myself during the Fall of 2019.

2.3   Content Analysis

At the beginning of my analysis, I used content analysis to help ascertain some of the relationships between words and themes from the interviews. Content analysis has become an increasingly useful tool for qualitative research, especially due to its ability to find meaning and connection in large texts and semi-structured interviews.[67] I have chosen to focus on the use of relational analysis, which uses proximity analysis to determine co-occurrence of contexts within the

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[66] Seitz, "Pixilated Partnerships, Overcoming Obstacles in Qualitative Interviews via Skype: A Research Note."
[67] Hsieh and Shannon, "Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis."

interview series as a whole.[68] I have used content analysis in aiding me in choosing the topics which I analyze in depth. The aforementioned topics are the construction of relationships and community, the understanding of evangelism within these trips, and the awareness of the line between helping and hurting.

To perform this content analysis, I used the open-source program KH Coder. Through this software, I created a Co-Occurrence Network of Words (see Figure 2). By creating a diagram displaying the co-occurrence network, I am better able to display the relationships between concepts via the proximity and frequency of grouped words. This type of diagram allows the researcher to examine some relationships that may not have stood out from my fieldnotes or other pre-analysis note-taking. The larger the circle is, the more frequently the word was used throughout the interviews. After the content analysis, I turned to conceptual analysis to aid in understanding the significance of the results.

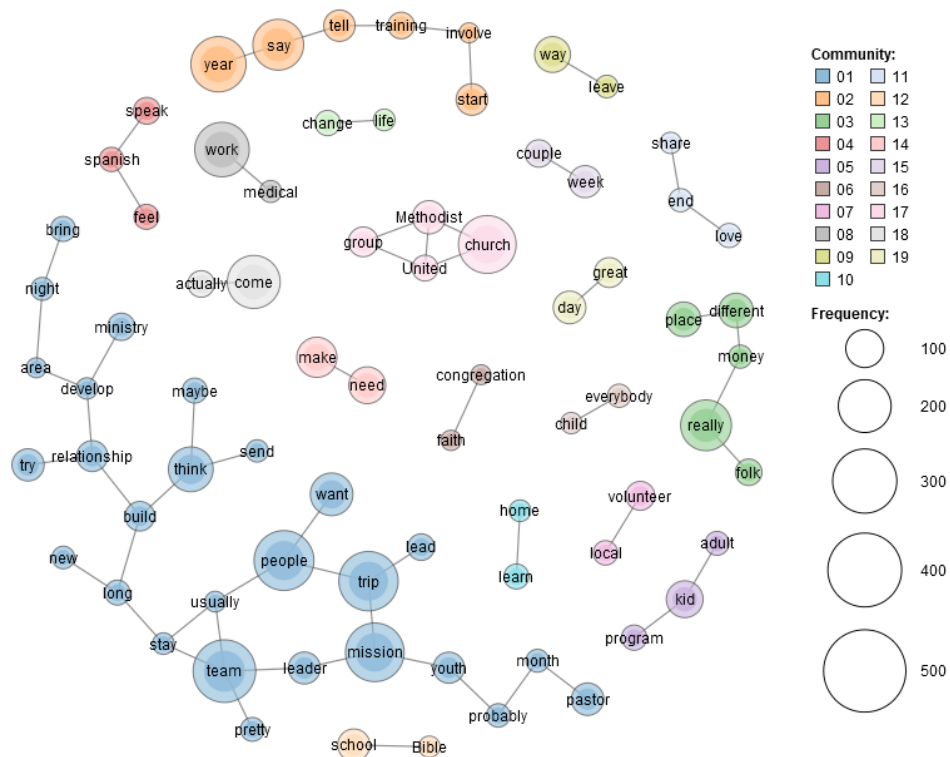[68] Busch, "Introduction to Content Analysis."

Figure 2: Co-Occurrence Network of Words

Some of the largest occurrences and greatest numbers of references throughout the interviews are to mission. This is to be expected as mission trips are the main subject of study. Here, we see the connections between "mission," "trip," "leader," and "youth" all commonly occurred together. Additionally, "mission" shares as node linking topics about "teams" and "people," as well as the more religious elements of "ministry" and "pastor." Many of these connections are unsurprising when examining the relationship that these teams have with their host communities and home churches.

The "relationship" node from Figure 2 is one that remains important in my later analysis. Relationship is not only intricately connected via the word community with "mission" and "people," but it is also at the center of "build," "try," and "develop." Central to these missioners' understanding of the purpose of their work completed on these mission trips is concepts of community-building and

relationship with both the host communities and home community. The importance of community and relationship is explored further in Chapter Three.

Moving on to the other notable connections, "Bible" and "school" appear together in the same community in Figure 2. This harkens back to the work typically done on these trips, which Paul described as primarily being construction work, Vacation Bible School (VBS) and then medical missions. We also see another community in Figure 2 linking "congregation" and "faith." Both instances of co-occurrence underline the importance of religion and links to implicit rather than explicit evangelism, which is explored in Chapter Four.

The last particularly illuminating co-occurrences are those having to do with the experiences of the volunteers, which I explore more thoroughly in Chapter Five. The issue with these questions pertains not only to volunteer experience, but the role which volunteers see themselves filling within the community. Some leaders have cited that completing mission trips has been a way for them to take a break from their everyday life by renewing and resting, while still remaining active.[69] Here, we see the connection between "change" and "life" as a frequent co-occurrence, which demonstrates that perception that volunteering can change the life of volunteers for the better. There is also a connection between "volunteers" and "locals" in Figure 2, demonstrating that the interaction between host and volunteer groups remains an important theme. The last of the connections important to this section on hurting versus helping is the issue of language, culture and race, as exemplified by "Spanish" surrounded by "speak" and "feel." Language issues reflect on the perception of community-building which is highlighted in the following chapter.

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[69] Boyd, "Operation Service: Rejuvinating and Life Changing." 77

Chapter Three: Community and Relationship Building

The most important thing we do is that we build a relationship, we're there to build relationships, and if you don't build relationship you can't even understand Christ. . . We have built a relationship with a community. It's remarkable when we arrive, the whole community comes out here to greet us. But, the first time we arrived, nobody was there. . . We built such a relationship with the community, and we keep coming back. I don't think it would be that way if we were going to different places each year—not that that's wrong. There's nothing wrong with that either. . . I think it's so important to go back. Important to go back and let the folks really understand what you care about." -Robert

3.1   Community and Home-Community: The Importance of Continuity

When discussing the place that these mission trips hold as an example of micro-level interactions of development, the person-to-person nature of these trips becomes even more important to discuss. A theme that was present in every interview was this concept of continuity. One of the aspects of UMC mission trips is that the churches return to the same host communities every year and, in some cases, multiple times per year. The leaders of the trips stated that this was one of the main "advantages" of participating in a church-led trip rather than a secular voluntouristic trip. Throughout the seven interviews, the word "community" was used 159 times, making it the 12th most used word, and the word "relationship" was used 65 times during the interviews, making it the 35th most used word. This repetition demonstrates how the topic of community remained pertinent in both the interviewees thought process and mine during the interview process. The leaders highlighted that they viewed themselves as constructing long-term, real relationships with host communities through returning repeatedly. However, with the translation issues and power dynamic incongruities, it is questionable how equal these relationships are. Secular voluntourism recreates and reinforces the systems of colonialism, in part because the volunteer is on location for such a short period of time with no encouragement to critically interact with the constructions of power present in the volunteer-

host dynamic.[70] In regards to these UMC mission trips, because there is encouragement for volunteers to do multiple mission trips, this community-building aspect of the trips takes precedence, which affects the volunteer-host dynamic by making such critical reflections both more and less likely. These reflections happen during the pre- and post-trip debriefing sessions held by the leaders, which are possible because the volunteers come from the same home community. After such de-briefs, returning volunteers are encouraged to critically reflect on the relationships built and the purposes of these trips. The political nature of reflection is what allows those who do critically engage with their experience to consider why and how they choose to build community, and in some instances, to reflect on the power-structures within these relationships.

During her interview, Lisa stated that by returning repeatedly to one community it is possible to "watch their children grow, so that you see the pastors that you've trained, and as they have children, see them get better in their ministry." Here, we see how community is defined by the relationships built between hosts and volunteers. These relationships help the volunteers to view themselves as building a transnational community between the host and mission team, especially due to the fact that the many of the missioners travel multiple times to the mission site. However, we must wonder what the purpose of this relationship building is, in the first place. The relationship between host and volunteer becomes important to the leaders interviewed for two reasons. The first reason having to do with the aversion to a "white savior" mentality and the second more aligned with evangelistic pursuits.

The mission leaders highlighted that teams frequently return annually to the same location, and that many of the volunteers attending these trips are the same individuals every trip. When discussing with Paul, he stated that during the UMVIM trainings, they recommend that half the team be comprised of returning volunteers and the other half new volunteers. Paul noted in his interview

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[70] McGloin and Georgeou, "'Looks Good on Your CV'" 451; Edensor, "Performing Tourism, Staging Tourism." 61.

that this makeup is to help the group from becoming too cliquey, while also allowing them to keep continuity and build relationship between hosts and volunteers. The returning volunteers are also able to socialize the new volunteers, thus reinforcing the value that is put in relationship building and as I note later, reciprocal help. This breath of fresh life into the volunteer group is part of what makes it possible for the these trips to purport that they are able to build community to a greater level compared to other secular volunteering trips, which may complete the same types of construction, education and medical work as the UMC trips conduct. However, with the returning volunteers gaining a type of seniority, critical reflection regarding the work and relationships built becomes more difficult as the returning volunteers act as guides for what is appropriate.

White saviorism has been intricately linked with critiques of voluntourism from the start. This can be seen in how recent critiques of voluntourism, which generally demonstrate that many volunteer organizations do not properly listen to the community's wants and needs, these missioners desire to avoid repeating these mistakes. Voluntourism is also often critiqued for appropriating the subaltern's voice, and perpetuating this myth of the white savior, a myth that places white people at the top of hierarchy and suggests that white people have a duty to "save" the other.[71] This white savior complex also comes with a performative aspect displayed on social media of all the "good" that the volunteers have done through their adventures in the Global South.[72]

This aversion to the association with white saviorism is demonstrated during Carol's interview: "we will not be the white people that ride in on the white horse, saying we are here to save you." By building community, leaders view their work as fundamentally different from the work of those who participate in one-off trips to build schools, give vaccines, etc. By viewing their work as helping friends

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[71] Bandyopadhyay and Patil, "'The White Woman's Burden' – the Racialized, Gendered Politics of Volunteer Tourism"; Sean Bex and Stef Craps, "Humanitarianism, Testimony, and the White Savior Industrial Complex: What Is the What versus Kony 2012."
[72] Nisha Toomey, "Humanitarians of Tinder: Constructing Whiteness and Consuming the Other"; Clost, "Voluntourism: The Visual Economy of International Volunteer Programs."

and members of a community that they consider themselves a part of, they are able to view this work as a group endeavor. This question of relationships and community is a complicated one, in that there is an inherent power-dynamic in the relationship between host and volunteer, with the volunteers bringing aid, knowledge and assistance from their home to teach and deliver to the host community. So, although there may be a perception of friendship among the volunteers, this "friendship" ignores the existing power dynamics which may make the hosts feel obligated to continue this relationship. This power imbalances may make some locals feel obligated to perform friendship for the volunteers in order to ensure their return the following year. Although the missioners view these relationships as reciprocal and as friendships, the pressure for the relationship is not equal on both sides.

However, the individual relationships between volunteers and members of the host community do continue to some extent after the trip has ended and between trips. The development of technology, especially social media, has not only allowed churches to be more connected with their own congregants, but also allowed for an expansion of this connection outside of the congregation.[73] Some leaders and some volunteers continue to interact with host communities, especially with the aid of WhatsApp and social media. This interaction is not limited to the development of upcoming trips, but as I found through my interviews, this communication extends to personal friendships, tutoring and mentoring conversations, as well. This shows that the relationships built with the community do not end with the trips but can continue after and are, in some ways, reciprocal.

The leaders noted that the level of Spanish held by most volunteers is minimal, but this does not seem to affect the leaders' impression that they are able to communicate strongly with members of the host community, despite poor language skills. With the assistance of Google Translate and hand gestures, the leaders noted that communication is possible. The fact that these relationships persist despite communication barriers even after the trip's end, demonstrates the importance of the

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[73] Meyer, "Religious Sensations. Why Media, Aesthetics and Power Matter in the Study of Contemporary Religion."

relationship-building process for the volunteer-host dynamic. If there was no actual relationship-building occurring, then there would be little reason for hosts and volunteers to continue their interactions after the duration of the trip. The reciprocity of relationship demonstrates that, despite existing power imbalances between hosts and volunteers, real relationship building does occur.

The emphasis on community building also demonstrates the desire to share the messages of the Christian faith with the community. Although I will go further in depth into the evangelical aspects of these UMC trips in Chapter Four, several leaders stated that a precondition for sharing the Word of God is the existence of a personal relationship. As stated by Robert: "if you don't build relationship you can't even understand Christ." The relationships built between volunteers and hosts is thus an important feature for the Christian motivations of this trip. While mission leaders view the volunteer-host relationship as a way to ensure that volunteers are better serving the community, it is also an integral avenue that facilitates religiously based conversations between volunteers and members of the host community as a part of the work completed on the trips. This relationships between hosts and volunteers allow for deeper conversations, which in time may lead to issues of religion and conversion. This is only, however, allowed once interpersonal relationships are formed, demonstrating how reciprocity in relationship and community-building remains at the center of evangelism as well.

3.2   Connections with the Home Community

There appears to be an understanding shared by the leaders that these trips can build and reinforce their church community back home by creating a common bond for the home community to gather around. For Wendy, an integral part of the trip involves sending updates to her congregation at home about their mission work, and for Robert, groups of returned volunteers and other congregants work together to run large fundraisers to support upcoming teams. Participants on mission trips often show increased sense of community both with other participants and at home, as

well as a feeling that they are able to directly make changes in the world.[74] The sense is that these trips can be used as a way to unify and bond the home congregations, and leaders put in effort to make the home congregation feel included in the mission process even for those who cannot or do not want to travel as part of a team.

This definition of home community is not limited to that of the congregation. One poignant example of this is an example given by Paul, where a group asked the church's custodian to accompany them on their upcoming trip to the Dominican Republic. The custodian was a catholic Columbian immigrant who was interested in what the church he worked for was doing on these trips. He attended the trip and helped provide linguistic and cultural translation for the group, and in this way was also better incorporated into the congregation as more than just an employee of the church. This presence of others from outside of the immediate congregation allows the home community to evolve through these instances of personal relationship and inclusion.

When thinking about this aspect of the community-building of these trips, it is important to discuss the general demographics of these trips. The majority of volunteers on secular trips have been shown to be young white women.[75] Ma has stated that "women indeed 'shine,'" especially when it comes to the increased number of female missionaries who followed the call to serve during the last several decades not only to do long term missions but also short term.[76] Women's place in mission and volunteer work could come from a history of limited opportunities in the work force for women and also a relation to women's "maternal instincts" and an opportunity for women to socialize in a meaningful way outside the home.[77] This could partially be responsible for the stereotype that women are more likely to volunteer and participate in modern voluntouristic endeavors. However, throughout

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[74] Boyd, "Operation Service: Rejuvinating and Life Changing." 75-76

[75] Bandyopadhyay and Patil, "'The White Woman's Burden' – the Racialized, Gendered Politics of Volunteer Tourism."

[76] Ma, "The Role of Christian Women in the Global South." 202

[77] Petrzelka and Mannon, "Keepin' This Little Town Going: Gender and Volunteerism in Rural America";
Bandyopadhyay and Patil, "'The White Woman's Burden' – the Racialized, Gendered Politics of Volunteer Tourism."

these interviews, most leaders noted that the teams were composed of equal parts men and women. This difference in volunteer make-up from religious to secular trips is also equally confounded by the higher rates of women who are actively religious in the US.[78]

Traditionally, voluntourism has been most alluring for college-aged individuals, but in the last several years, the most common age of voluntourists was between 25 and 35.[79] Interestingly, the missioners on UMC trips trended older, with a large number of volunteers being above middle age. The exception to this were mission trips specifically for youth, generally defined as high school and college-aged individuals, and family mission trips, where parents (and sometimes grandparents) went together with their children. The discrepancy between the ages of voluntourists and mission volunteers could be caused partially by finances, with older missioners being able to self-fund their mission experiences without extensive fundraising. Another reason could be attributed to current age trends in church members of the UMC with 29% being 30-49 and 30% being 50-65 years old.[80] This breakdown of age cohorts could account for this difference as well. Lastly, another reason for this discrepancy could be motivational. While younger people are more likely to take part in international volunteering experiences for resume building or self-discovery, middle-aged volunteers often cite "searching for life-meaning amidst the daily routine" as their largest motivator.[81]

Perhaps what makes voluntourism so "sexy"[82] to young tourists, is that helping people thousands of miles away from one's own home does not require any sort of critical reflection on the causes of poverty.[83] To volunteer to help eradicate poverty back home often requires a discussion of the root causes of inequality, but by traveling to a faraway location, one removes the contextual

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[78] "U.S. Religious Groups."
[79] Schulz, "Voluntourism."
[80] "U.S. Religious Groups."
[81] McGloin and Georgeou, "'Looks Good on Your CV'"; Schulz, "Voluntourism."
[82] The term "sexy" is generally used in the development discourse to denote projects that are attractive to both donors and volunteers. See: Cameron and Haanstra, "Development Made Sexy: How It Happened and What It Means."
[83] Bandyopadhyay and Patil, "'The White Woman's Burden' – the Racialized, Gendered Politics of Volunteer Tourism."

understanding of poverty from the equation and it becomes easier to address the symptoms of poverty without reflecting on the reasons. This links back to this issue of white saviorism in voluntourism, which allows groups to remain uncritical of the societal ills in their home communities that lead to inequality and poverty back home and abroad. Relating back to issues of decolonization and global coloniality, volunteers who are only addressing symptoms of inequality and poverty are ignoring the causes found often in colonial and neo-colonial societal structures. By travelling and focusing on culture shocks, volunteers are able to gloss over the connections that lasting poverty has with colonial rule. By travelling to save others in faraway lands, the volunteers do not need to come to grips with their privileges and how their actions may or may not contribute to inequality globally as well as back in the US.

This is further complicated by the usage of images in the media of suffering and poverty in distant places is one of the main ways that a sense of "global compassion" and desire for humanitarian work is formed.[84] As Haskell clarifies, for the populace to want to become engaged in humanitarian efforts, they need to not only understand that there is a problem to be addressed, but also feel that they have the ability to address this issue and create effective change.[85] This is not much unlike current notions of Personal Social Responsibility (PSR). It is important to examine the role that PSR plays in the development of voluntourist programs and organizations; participants often feel a type of responsibility to "help out."[86] Volunteers see themselves as taking on the task of PSR in a literal sense. This could be additionally useful in the context of religiously motivated trips due to the diaconian recommendations to assist and build community. These trips allow for the fulfillment of this desire to help but allows it to be done in a more glamourous way. The glamor comes from the excitement and

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[84] Martini and Jauhola, *Journeys in Aidland: An Autobiographic Exploration of Resistance to Development Aid.* 83
[85] Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 1."
[86] Foller-Carroll and Charlebois, "The Attitudes of Students and Young Professionals toward VolunTourism."

adventure of traveling to faraway places, while also allowing missioners to discuss these trips in a way that demonstrates their selflessness at the same time in a sort of "humble brag."

The volunteers on these mission trips lead by the UMC demonstrate this PSR to volunteer not only by assisting in mission work, but also by building a stronger community with their home congregation. Due to the UMC's general commitment to consistently lead trips to the same location, it becomes possible for this continuity of volunteers and leaders to lead to the formation of long-lasting relationships between the host and home communities. The relationship between the volunteer and host is emphasized to be a reciprocal one, demonstrated by the desire to create a relationship that allows for the communication of more than the wants and needs of the host. However, the lack of reflexivity in the relationship caused by the lack of reflection on the power dynamics at play due to neo-colonial societal remnants create the possibility of performative relationships to please the volunteer as opposed to true reciprocity.

This community-building and relationship aspect of UMC mission trips does not stop with the in-country experiences but continues with the use of social media. Additionally, the home community is able to use these trips as a way to build their outreach to those on the outskirts of the congregation and also use the experiences felt in mission to better link those who have previously travelled or cannot travel to the mission site. This expansion of the home community demonstrates the way that the community built by these trips is transnational with community building occurring on both sides of the trip. The lines of compassion are built amongst this transnational community leading to more inclusive participation in these trips by the home congregations, which allows for more inclusivity in the home community as well.

Chapter Four: What is Evangelism's Place?

"We do some Vacation Bible School activities and games and things, but a little bit less of that these days. If I had more people that spoke the language, then maybe we would do more of the Vacation Bible School model. . . One time, we brought all this yarn one to make God's Eyes. We were trying to get the kids to make God's Eyes and the parents—well, the moms—are just hovering. Later we find out that the moms are hungry for yarn because they make amazing artistry work, which they then sell to feed their families. So it was totally ridiculous and not community appropriate for us to be make their kids cut this yarn that was really valuable to them."   -Lauren

4.1   They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love

The volunteer mission trips of today can be connected to historical Christian pilgrimages, which from a theological standpoint are considered optional.[87] The modern mission trips of the latter half of the 20th century until today, which are more focused on alleviating poverty, have moved away from explicit evangelism and towards a sort of implicit evangelism.[88] The connection between voluntourism and religion is present in more than just short-term mission trips, as the inception of volunteering is rooted in Christian tradition.[89] This chapter outlines the ways in which these two types of evangelism continue to proliferate within the confines of UMC mission trips. In this section, I will focus on how evangelism exists in both implicit and explicit ways during these trips and the implications of these evangelisms.

The UMC prohibits evangelism and "overt proselytism" as a part of short-term missions, as noted during Paul's interview. This prohibition differs from some other churches, especially American Evangelical ones, which conduct short-term mission trips which are primarily focused on witnessing,

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[87] Hasan, *Religion and Development in the Global South.*
[88] Brouwer, "When Missions Became Development."
[89] Bandyopadhyay and Patil, "'The White Woman's Burden' – the Racialized, Gendered Politics of Volunteer Tourism"; Wilson and Janoski, "The Contribution of Religion to Volunteer Work."

evangelizing and conversion in host communities.[90] However, just because there is a moratorium on evangelism by the UMC, that does not mean that religion and religious imaginings play no role. An instance of this connection emerged in my interviews with mission trip leaders, with the repeated allusion made to the 1966 hymn "They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love." By this, the interviewees were stating that they are not using their words to spread Christianity, but instead use their "love" or rather, their actions. In this way, we can see how the leaders imagine their labor not only as an act of love but also as an instance of modelling Christ for the host community. This demonstrates the way in which the labor of the volunteers, which is most often construction-based labor, is being presented as not only a way to build and strengthen the host community, but as an instance of opening the door to discussions about why they do this work and subsequently about their religious motivations.

The precise wording of the leaders varied and brought nuances to the ways in which they viewed evangelism's place on the mission trips. For example, Carol stated in her interview that "they're going to know us by our actions," when asked about evangelism's role. Here, we see once again the emphasis on the actions of the volunteers and how this action is considered as equivalent to or representative of more overt proselytizing. In Wendy's interview, she reiterated that their evangelism is known because they are "wearing the Christian faith on [their] sleeve[s]," and thus making their faith known through works. Similarly, Paul stated that he encourages groups to use the "Franciscan model of preach[ing] the gospel at all times and when necessary us[ing] words." By this we see that there is a direct link between the actions and their ability to function as a type of evangelism. By modelling Christ, these leaders do not feel it necessary to bring the literal gospel into their interactions with the

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[90] Rowe, "The Global—and Globalist—Roots of Evangelical Action"; Blazer, "Making the Save:"

host community. This varies from the emphasis on witnessing by American Evangelical groups, who often lead trips to facilitate conversions as part of the Great Commission.[91]

How exactly does this type of Christ modelling work as a form of evangelism though? Lisa refers to it as a type of " trickle down evangelism," alluding to Reagan's trickledown economics. I interpret this to mean that volunteers hope that their actions will be the catalyst for host community members to ask them about their motivations for volunteering. Such conversations would subsequently lead to a discussion about religion. This curiosity from the locals allows the volunteers to enter conversations about how religion, Christ, and conversion play a role in the volunteers' motivations and imaginings of their position within the volunteer/host continuum. The "Franciscan model" reflects back on the principle of "good works," which demonstrates the necessity of doing charity for salvation.[92] Such good works function to model Christ, help the poor and create openings for discussion of salvation with the locals. This emphasis on relationship demonstrates the importance of a reciprocal relationship for the volunteers because without a relationship based on give-and-take, there is no room for missioners to give their insights on religion. Additionally, this leads to volunteers partaking in neo-colonial imaginings which place them in the position of those who hold desirable knowledge to be shared with the locals. This modelling Christ plays into the understanding of the politics of the everyday, by once again, demonstrating how this action that to missioners seems apolitical or exclusively religiously motivated is a manifestation of political action, which reinforces colonial understandings of the value of Anglo-European knowledge and culture.

As noted in the previous chapter, a relationship with the host community is a prerequisite for any evangelizing work to begin, as it is ineffective to share about religion without a personal connection. Kim noted in her interview that they "serve through the relationship that [they] develop."

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[91] "Matthew 28:18-20."
[92] "James 2:14-26"; Jones, *United Methodist Doctrine.*

By encouraging a relationship, there is a certain level of reciprocity, which may also lead to a deepening of faith for the volunteers. DeTemple states that "tourism opens up the possibility of conversion" but as these trips are non-evangelizing in nature, there is a certain understanding that the participants are the ones experiencing conversion, not the host communities.[93] This deepening of their own individual convictions and religious belief is also coupled with the fact that some volunteers are not members of the sending church, or sometimes of any church. In this way, the religious experiences felt by the volunteers may work to convert or strengthen the bonds that some non-church participants feel with the church. Through the evening devotions, these non-members are better integrated into the group, demonstrating an instance of double-evangelization. This double-evangelism works to strengthen the volunteers own faith and bonds with the hosts. While on the one hand missioners hope to share their religion with the host community, they are using these experiences to create a stronger connection, demonstrating how within the volunteers themselves there is a type of reciprocal sharing and receiving of conversion. Showing that while evangelism is present in the trips, the perceived benefactors of conversation are not always the hosts, as might be assumed, but the volunteers themselves.

4.2   Explicit Moments of Evangelism

As these mission trips are associated with a church, there is no surprise that there are explicit moments of evangelism present within their confines. Harari states, that religions must be both "universal and missionary" to maximally take advantage of their ability to create and build political systems; universal in the beliefs held by the group and missionary in their desire to spread these beliefs.[94] This demonstrates how the political aspects of these micro-interactions of development as

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[93] DeTemple, "'Haiti Appeared At My Church': Faith-Based Organizations, Transnational Activism, And Tourism In Sustainable Development." 173
[94] Harari, *Sapiens*.

seen in mission work, are irrevocably linked with this missionary element. This missionary element is an example of how religious organizations are influenced in their approach to development work. However, although non-religious development organizations do not have this evangelistic element, it is unfair to state that they are less biased in their motivations. [95]

One instance of explicit missionary work that occurs on many trips is the existence of VBSes as a part of the trip. When discussing the lack of evangelism on the trip, Paul stated that VBSes are exempt from this prohibition. VBS activities are designed for elementary school-aged children and contain a mix of crafts, sports and songs to help children learn scripture and biblical lessons. Paul noted that the VBS curriculum is generally taken and translated from the same curriculum developed for the home congregation; he even goes so far to note that such curriculum may not "translate culturally, even if they can be translated. . . linguistically." This use of non-culturally sensitive VBS materials can be seen as a type of cultural imperialism. The Westernized and Christianized worldview brought by volunteers is pushed on the locals as a form of hegemonic culture.[96] In summer of 2019, a VBS curriculum, from one of the largest Christian publishing houses in the US, entitled "Roar!," was "Africa"-themed. This material instructed teachers to refer to the children as "lazy slaves," make mud bricks and mimic African languages by encouraging "tongue-clicking."[97] In addition to the racism with this programing, there was also the problem that some churches had planned to translate this material for their summer mission trips. Paul noted, that during the mission training, leaders were directly instructed not to use this material, due to the issues with racism, but it is not known how many groups followed this guidance. Although this is an extreme example of cultural insensitivity and racism in VBS curriculum, it serves to demonstrate how the American VBS lessons can perpetuate harmful

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[95] Cochrane, "Religion in Sustainable Development." 92

[96] Kapoor, *The Postcolonial Politics of Development*. 47.

[97] Martinez, "When Vacation Bible School Includes a Slavery Role Play."

stereotypes and reinforce colonial power structures that place Western cultures at the top and emphasize the perceived backwardness of the subaltern.

The desire to maintain evangelizing elements through VBS has also created issues that individual leaders have noticed. As noted in Lauren's interview, her church decided to discontinue VBS activities because they realized the use of craft materials by children was culturally insensitive because yarn is highly valued by the women of that society. Cultural literacy allowed the leaders to notice the ways in which this VBS was not benefitting the community. The fact that this church was able to quickly abandon the VBS programming once this awareness arose, further works to demonstrate that although VBS is allowed on these trips, it is rarely, if ever, the focus of the trips, but instead is a bonus activity in conjunction with the physical labor that occur in the daytime hours and is the primary focus of the group's energy. Here we see how community-building and relationships with the host community lead to a more reflexive and thusly appropriate mission experience for both hosts and volunteers.

In none of the interviews was the religious aspects of VBS activities questioned, but all groups who led VBSes did so in addition to the construction work as a way to better connect with local children. If anything, when questioned about evangelism, groups seemed to either view their implicit evangelism as enough. However, Robert did note that evangelism is "something that we've thought that we'd like to start doing," but also noted that this would be nearly impossible to implement due to the inability to lengthen the trips' duration. In this way, we can see how explicit evangelism takes the backseat compared to the physical labor done by the mission volunteers. As noted in the previous section, this labor serves as part of the implicit evangelism occurring during these trips.

Another aspect of explicit evangelism is the misalignment of volunteer expectations and the expectations of the leaders and church. Even in the handbook for leaders, there is a segment on

mitigating this misalignment of volunteer expectations about meaning of evangelism on these trips.[98] This misalignment is caused primarily when volunteers have a desire to explicitly go and "save" individuals while on their mission trip. Lisa gives an example of this during her interview where she had one volunteer who was set on witnessing in the town's main square. She highlighted how this would not only be dangerous for this young man, but also to explain to him that this would be a culturally inappropriate moment as "God is already there." In this way, we can see how leaders take it upon themselves to enforce this rule against explicit evangelism.

Leaders enforce this prohibition not only because of safety guidelines, but also because of the understanding that although the host community members are members of another denomination, they are still Christians. It is important to acknowledge that the Latin American countries, where these trips occurred, have a primarily Christian, albeit Catholic, populations.[99] In Latin America, Protestants are frequently poorer than their Catholic neighbors, but also put stronger emphasis on education than equally poor non-Protestant families.[100] This demonstrates some of the differences between Catholic and Protestant individuals in Latin America. So, although there are differences in the two groups, the leaders of these trips do not view themselves as bringing God to a Godless place.

The way that UMC trip leaders view the American Evangelicals who conduct trips that focus entirely on evangelizing efforts demonstrates this disconnect between implicit and explicit evangelism. Here we see a pushback on traditional mission trips and civilizing missions that brought knowledge from the Global North and forced it upon those in the Global South. For example, Lauren states that she is "less comfortable with the evangelical model" because she believes that mission trips should emphasize "learning on both sides." This learning implies that the relationship between the hosts and volunteers needs to be reciprocal, where volunteers are able to strengthen their faith and widen their

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[98] "Team Leader Toolkit United Methodist Volunteers in Mission Northeastern Jurisdiction."
[99] NW, Washington, and Inquiries, "Religion in Latin America."
[100] Woodberry, "The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy." 252

worldview through the trips, while the hosts learn more about faith from the missioners. This aversion to this type of straightforward evangelism goes back to the focus on community and relationships as discussed in Chapter Three. Here, we see once again that the focus is first building a relationship and second leading and demonstrating Christ-like actions through their work. By emphasizing a learning experience on both sides, the leaders challenge the traditional civilizing elements of mission by reframing their position into that of building a community. This community aspect allows not only for more effective project planning, but also for the relationships needed to form reciprocal bonds that lead to long lasting relationships and, in some cases, conversion.

Evangelism finds its place in UMC mission trips in the unspoken acts of the volunteers who seek to model Christ to the host community through their good works. Although there are instances of more explicit evangelism in activities such as VBS, these activities are overshadowed by the physical work that volunteers do either through construction or medical missions. By modelling Christ, the missioners can better connect with their own faith, while viewing the work they do as an opportunity for faith-based discussions with the hosts once relationships are built creating a sort of double-evangelism.

Chapter Five: To Hurt or to Help

> *A team goes into a town and sees a brightly painted building. The team leader asks a community leader, 'So what is that?' And [the community leader] responds and says, 'Well that's the building that we let every team paint because that's all they want to do when they come here.' And so we're trying to move away from that kind of mentality to what is really needed there and what can be sustainable and that can help your community in ways that are meaningful, rather than us coming in and telling you what you need." -Lisa*

5.1   Neo-Colonial Awareness in Mission Leaders

When thinking about whether such trips "help" or "hurt" a community, the issues of effectiveness and neo-colonial relationships rise to the forefront of the conversations. These trips are intended to help the communities in which they serve, but recent critiques of similar voluntourist trips highlight problematics such as the reinforcement of neo-colonial power structures and trust issues with medical voluntourism.[101] When thinking about how voluntourism and short-term mission trips interact with neo-colonial institutions, it is important to note that, as Kapoor states, the decolonization process was a "failure" or at the minimum an "unfinished project."[102] This unfinished project has allowed the space for neo-colonial structures that replicate colonial power-dynamics to emerge in the Global South. In this chapter, I discuss the leaders' awareness of such critiques along with the actions and inactions taken by the church taken to mitigate these critiques. In section three, I will discuss how despite critiques there is a perception that these trips are beneficial if only for what they do to the volunteer's perceptions of the world.

When volunteer tourism began in the 1960's, there was a greater level of critique leveled at donors and sponsoring organizations rather than volunteers, but currently, neo-colonialist critiques

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[101] Lasker, *Hoping to Help*; Bandyopadhyay and Patil, "'The White Woman's Burden' – the Racialized, Gendered Politics of Volunteer Tourism"; Rosenberg, "The Business of Voluntourism."
[102] Kapoor, *The Postcolonial Politics of Development*. 53.

are levied against the tourism industry and the volunteers themselves.[103] These critiques have grown and changed over the years to now incorporate the differing ways that these trips work to perpetuate neo-colonial imaginings of the world, which often place English language, Anglo-American culture and economic development as goals for the Global South's modernization. New interactions of voluntourism encounter more nuanced critiques, such as university "service learning" types of trips in the Global North being critiqued for perpetuating neo-colonial power structures by portraying service-learning as part of developmental discourse.[104] As discussed previously, the desire to "develop" and modernize is a colonial endeavor because even systems that concede to multiple modernities, still filter such modernities through a Eurocentric lens.[105] So even though some interventions may seem like they help local communities such as the case with service learning, when examined further they do not.

The leaders of these mission trips are aware of the critiques that are levied against trips similar to their own and have had varying reactions to such critiques. The mission leaders interviewed desired to avoid the mistakes that voluntouristic trips have made which reinforce neo-coloniality. This can be seen in the story that Paul and Lisa told during their interviews of a wall or school repainted multiple times by each volunteer group as a tangible action for groups to feel like they "made their mark" on the community. The action is shown to mean far more to volunteers than the community itself and acts as a moral warning that volunteers need to listen to the host community and what they actually need instead of coming in with their own ideas of what their mission should be.

In her interview, Lisa reiterates this by saying "we all can learn from [the host community]. It doesn't take an American to solve the problem. We don't know it all." While the leaders try to

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[103] Palacios, "Volunteer Tourism, Development and Education in a Postcolonial World: Conceiving Global Connections beyond Aid." 863
[104] Palacios. 862
[105] Munck, "Global Sociology: Towards an Alternative Southern Paradigm."

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emphasize that they need to listen to community needs, there is also the issue that many volunteers come in with their preconceived notions of what is needed in the community. The leaders find that it can be difficult to navigate the area between volunteer expectations and reality on the ground. To combat these issues, some leaders such as Carol have been trying to implement a vetting process to guarantee that the volunteers are open-minded, especially after she had issues with inappropriate behavior and ethnocentrism in previous teams. The difficulty here is that there is no clear way to make the mission trips accessible to the home community and non-exclusive, while also creating a thorough vetting process for volunteers. As churches continue to react to neo-colonial critiques of short-term missions, this question of how to guarantee that the mission team is open-minded and that their expectations of the trip align with what will happen will continue to be a complicated issue for teams to address. Despite the addition of a vetting process, if there is not proper discussion of how well-meaning actions can have ill effects, such trips may continue to reinforce host-volunteer relationships that echo colonial relationships.

In addition to the lack of listening to the host community, there have been other critiques levied at voluntourism. There has been significant critique of voluntourists inappropriately posting pictures on social media, these photos often display a white volunteer surrounded by the black and brown children whom they are "helping," which is a prime example of voluntourism fulfilling white savior fantasies of the voluntourists.[106] There is an expectation in place, that the "exotic" pictures taken on voluntouristic trips are something that those in the home community will be envious of.[107] Many churches, including the UMC, have taken a critical role in this practice by either disallowing, or at the minimum, discouraging social media posting during the trip and encouraging individuals to post

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[106] Garland, "The Visual Rhetoric of 'Voluntourists' and Aid Workers in Post-Earthquake Haiti" 83; Nisha Toomey, "Humanitarians of Tinder: Constructing Whiteness and Consuming the Other"; Bandyopadhyay and Patil, "'The White Woman's Burden' – the Racialized, Gendered Politics of Volunteer Tourism."
[107] Martini and Jauhola, *Journeys in Aidland: An Autobiographic Exploration of Resistance to Development Aid*. 84.

about what they "learn," rather than what they see.[108] The UMVIM training guide does state that permission must be received to take photos of children, as part of their "safe sanctuaries" policy and also that there is a session on "photography etiquette" during the training session.[109] In this way, it can be seen that the church is attempting to educate volunteers about the issues associated with poverty pornography[110] and by extension the way these photographs position the volunteers as (white) saviors. The UMC's attempt to distance the mission trips from these discourses of social media instrumented white saviorism demonstrates how the awareness of white-savior critiques have led to adjustments in advertisements, but it is unclear how this change has led to change in volunteers' attitude and behaviors.

5.2   UMC and the Racial Question

Mission, development, culture and race historically have had a deep connection with a history of colonialism in the Global South. Churches in the US have specifically struggled with these questions of race, as churches, including the Methodist churches, have remained some of the most deeply segregated spaces in the US.[111] Although the denomination as a whole is majority white, many of the mission trip leaders noted that their trips are almost exclusively comprised of white congregants in a way that is even more skewed than the demographic makeup of the UMC. Because of this, it is important to address how these elements of race, language and culture arise in my analysis of UMC mission trips.

There is an acute awareness of these issues within the UMC as seen by the changes made in recent years to make mission spaces more inclusive. In the past several years, Paul stated that he, along

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[108] Corbett and Fikkert, "Helping Without Hurting in Short-Term Missions."
[109] "Team Leader Toolkit United Methodist Volunteers in Mission Northeastern Jurisdiction."
[110] Garland, "The Visual Rhetoric of 'Voluntourists' and Aid Workers in Post-Earthquake Haiti."
[111] Davis, "Birth of a Nation, Birth of a Church"; "U.S. Religious Groups."

with the other UMVIM regional coordinators, has worked to address issues with the training manuals used to train mission trip leaders. The old handbooks discussed issues of culture and intercultural exchange but did mention race dynamics within the US or within host communities. Paul noted that to remedy this the UMC's "Commission on Religion and Race helped me look through the manual and find places where we could look critically at how we were presenting and training. . . with an eye for ways [the training manual] might be sending signals that this is a white's only sort of thing." By working to rewrite these manuals to be more racially sensitive, the UMC hopes to make mission trips more inclusive to both non-white volunteers and non-white host communities. As these US American missioners bring their own understandings of the world and race along with them to the host community, it is important for the mission leaders to be culturally sensitive and to actively attempt to combat existing prejudices held by mission teams, especially when considering the problematic and damaging white savior narratives and civilizing missions, which came out of the 19th and 20th centuries colonial movements.

The instrumentalization of language on these trips presents another issue. As noted by the interviewees, the missioners who take part on these trips are primarily white, middle-class and English speaking, although some of the mission trip leaders noted that amongst the younger missioners, some had high school or college-level Spanish. Culture, and by extension language, has historically been used as a function of modernization, in that culture has been instrumentalized when useful for modernization efforts and erased when it has hindered such processes.[112] This erasure can be seen in the increased pressure for individuals in the Global South to learn European languages and Westernize. When discussing post-colonial influences on mission trips, it is thusly important to discuss how the missioners interact with language and the politics surrounding it.

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[112] Kapoor, *The Postcolonial Politics of Development*. 20.

Unsurprisingly, there is documented evidence of English's hegemonic position within development volunteering and aid organizations, with many volunteers viewing their presence as a useful experience for members of the host-community to practice their English.[113] The volunteers are encouraged, but in no ways required, to learn any Spanish before travelling to Latin America for their mission trips. Language learning apps, such as Duolingo, have made language acquisition easier for volunteers to undertake, but the majority of the leaders interviewed stated that very few make serious attempts to learn Spanish. Additionally, in communities where indigenous languages are primarily spoken, the volunteers are not given meaningful resources to learn these languages. This lack of Spanish or indigenous language knowledge held by the participants is exacerbated by some volunteer's view that speaking English with the local children and community members as an opportunity for these individuals in the host community to better their English. Learning English often cannot be linked to social mobility and development of individuals.[114] This increased emphasis on "global" languages, such as English and Spanish, also works to mimic and mirror colonial structures by placing increased emphasis on learning European languages rather than local languages and dialects. This, paired with Latin America's colonial past, only works to further racialize and discriminate against natives and keep native languages suppressed.[115] By relying on local children who speak Spanish and hand gestures to communicate with the host community when paid translators are not available, the mission teams exhibit their own privilege and inherent. This view held by volunteers about "usefulness" of language learning also reflects neo-colonial structures which not only place English above Spanish but also discounts indigenous languages all together.

[113] Palacios, "Volunteer Tourism, Development and Education in a Postcolonial World: Conceiving Global Connections beyond Aid."

[114] Jakubiak, "Ambiguous Aims." 248

[115] Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*.

When it comes to the problematics of language, even though most of the mission trip leaders and volunteers do not speak Spanish, they are able to communicate with the host community regardless. For example, during his interview, Robert stated that "I can get down and spend a week without being able to speak a single word of Spanish. At this point with this community, we know them. You just learn with your eyes and with your touch." This view demonstrates a belief held by some volunteers that they can communicate without knowledge of the local language and demonstrates the dismissive nature that neglecting to learn local languages holds. This disregard demonstrates the privilege that volunteers have in not feeling an obligation to learn more than their native language. By neglecting to learn local languages, volunteers are able to make more assumptions as to the nature of their relationships with locals. How these relationships can exist in a meaningful way without proper channels for communication is unclear. Carol notes that often volunteers lament their poor Spanish levels once they return to the US, but she also notes that those who go on a second mission trip generally do not return with higher levels of Spanish the following year. This demonstrates that there is an understanding by missioners that their lack of language skills negatively impacts their capacity for relationship building, but due to the ease of inaction, and possibly their position within a culturally hegemonic group, many do not take the needed steps to help take these relationships to the next level.

5.3   Despite Critiques: How Self-Improvement Acts as a Justification

In the discourse on secular voluntourism initiatives, there is evidence that some volunteers primarily participate for their own self-gratification, not for altruistic reasons.[116] This finding resonates in my interviews with the leaders of UMC mission trips. Although many of these leaders wish to avoid

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[116] McGloin and Georgeou, "'Looks Good on Your CV'"; Schulz, "Voluntourism."

replicating neo-colonial power relationships, and there is a desire to make volunteers and trips more racially and culturally sensitive to both volunteers and host communities, there is still an understanding that one of the most valuable aspects that these mission trips provide is to the missioners themselves. This widening of volunteer worldview and expansion of the missioners horizons is then used to justify the existence of these trips, despite existing criticisms.

One example of this emphasis on volunteer experience above all else is found in how one interviewee, Lauren, desires to write a response essay about the effectiveness of short-term mission trips, and how they work to "transform people's lives even in one week." Here, we see how even though there has been pushback on the ways that these trips operate within the host community, there is still this perception that the volunteers continue benefitting from the experience. In this way, the hosts serve as a transformative and reflective lens that missioners can use to change their own life. This is reflected in what is known as the "tourist gaze," which displays itself by the power dynamics displayed in an interaction between a western-tourist and a third world national; the tourist is able to both normalize and critique the local's lifestyles.[117] The missioners are able to use the locals as way to reexamine the actions in their own life, using them as something counter to themselves. This tourist gaze and volunteer gaze held by the missioners places them in an extractive relationship with the hosts, with the volunteers gleaning transformation and confirmation of their altruism.

This narrative of doing it "for yourself" has been observed in the way that both mission-based volunteers and secular volunteers view themselves as "embarking on sacred journeys," while viewing the work that they do on these journeys as both a "help" to others and a transformation of themselves.[118] The sacred-ness of these journeys comes from the transformative nature of them. The desire for self-transformation connects with 2010's emphasis on self-care and wellness culture in that

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[117] Maoz, "The Mutual Gaze."
[118] Edles, "International Voluntourism as Secular Pilgrimage."

wellness culture encourages mindfulness and transformation similarly to how these trips encourage volunteers to reflect and evolve.[119] However, this desire to transform oneself and change for the better is not the only thing that volunteers get out of these experiences. There are indeed more literal benefits of volunteering, such as benefits to your resume or college applications, elevated status in one's home community and increased friendship and bonding with team members.

For many of the younger people on these trips, mission trip leaders noted that these experiences helped them, both when applying for college and jobs. Wendy noted in her interview that these trips help "young people put their life in perspective" and that many involved in the youth mission trips (generally made up of middle and high schoolers) went on to use experiences from these mission trips to strengthen their college applications. The use of voluntourism experiences as a resume enhancement for job and university applications is well documented within secular voluntourism.[120] Something that is also present in terms of these UMC mission trips. Interestingly, some volunteers go on to change their career paths or course of studies after these trips, showing the strength of the transformative nature of these trips, especially among younger volunteers.

There is the self-led reason for volunteering that intersects with securing and strengthening the volunteer's position within their home community. Many of the interviewees stated that past volunteers later become more active in the church. This aligns with Beyerlein's research that states that young people who participate on mission trips are more likely to be civically engaged upon returning home.[121] In Robert's interview, he told the story of a young woman who struggled to make friends before joining the mission team. He went on to detail how since the end of the trip, this woman has now become fully integrated into the church. This anecdote shows how these trips have allowed some volunteers to transform not only their perceptions of the world but also their social relationships.

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[119] Blei, "The False Promises of Wellness Culture."

[120] Wright, "Volunteer Tourism and Its (Mis)Perceptions: A Comparative Analysis of Tourist/Host Perceptions."

[121] Beyerlein, Adler, and Trinitapoli, "The Effect of Religious Short-Term Mission Trips on Youth Civic Engagement."

This relationship between internal transformation and external change in social positioning demonstrate that these trips provide an array of transformative experiences for volunteers. External transformations such as this subsequently become an easy way for leaders to demonstrate the importance of these trips.

The actions and beliefs of mission leaders play a pivotal role in how these trips act to either help or hurt host communities. Firstly, the moral and political framing of mission trips: leaders, with their understanding of the possible neo-colonial implications of volunteer mission trips, attempt to mitigate the possibility of hurting the host community through trainings and vetting for teams. Secondly, practice in the field: mission leaders now attempt to emphasize listening to the needs of the host community before assuming that they know best. Thirdly, when it comes to race, the UMC is making an effort to make missions less of a "white's only" endeavor by adjusting their training materials to acknowledge the complicated ethno-racial tensions of missions from the US to the Global South. However, this movement away from non-reflexive mission is still a work in progress. For example, when it comes to language learning, there is still much work to be done to ensure that these trips can be used to effectively build community. Lastly, there is a perception held amongst leaders that despite critiques of such trips, these trips are overall beneficial because of the transformative experiences felt by volunteers. These transformations are not inherently harmful to the host communities, but they do call into question who these trips primarily help. The final justifications for the continuance of these trips depends on a change and benefit to the volunteer. Although the physical labor and medical missions provided to the host communities do provide some development assistance, the focus on transformations in volunteers' lives and thought processes allows mission leaders to avoid critically addressing some critiques of the trips.

Conclusion:

This thesis explored how short-term mission trips address issues of neo-coloniality and their unique positions within the field of post-development studies. By examining the views of mission trip leaders three recurring themes were identified as instrumental for understanding short-term mission trips: the reciprocal building of relationships both in the host and home communities, the evangelism plays a role on these trips and UMC mission leaders' responses to neo-colonial critiques of their work.

Chapter One interrogated literature from post-colonial and post-development studies, situating my research in these fields. Using post-colonial theories, I examined the ways in which these trips perpetuate neo-colonial power structures and how the leaders and UMC react to critiques of neo-colonialism. Through post-development literature, I explored how shot-term mission trips exist as an example of micro-level development. Therein addressing a gap found within the voluntourism and dark tourism literature that has neglected to fully examine the influence and differing positionality held by those on international religious volunteering trips. This thesis sought to fill this conceptual gap by using the UMC short-term mission trips as a case study. In Chapter Two, I highlighted the methodology used in gathering data through interviews with leaders of the UMC mission trips, demonstrating as to how the use of content analysis helped strengthen my choices for the analysis presented in Chapters Three through Five.

Chapter Three explored ideas relating to the nature of community as found within these trips. The community-building endeavor demonstrates the reciprocal relationships that are built as a part of these trips. The reciprocity in these relationships was shown to be important to the volunteers and mission leaders as it is what allows for the possibility of future conversations regarding conversion. However, there is the possibility of performative friendship on the part of the hosts as the power dynamics in these relationships were shown to be unequal. Notions of community were then further complicated in exploring as to how linkages between the home community, including non-travelling

members of the congregation, and the host community can be thought of as a site in which a transnational community can be created.

Chapter Four considered the use of evangelism on these trips, especially due to the UMCs prohibition of overt evangelism. Through implicit instances of evangelism, volunteers seek to model Christ through their actions. Volunteers hope that by doing this, their actions will serve as a catalyst for conversations on religion, reiterating the importance of how reciprocal relationships connect to evangelism. Not only this, but issues of reciprocity emerged again in relation to double-evangelism, where volunteers use their experiences as a way to deepen their own religious convictions. In addition to these implicit and double-evangelism present, there are small instances of explicit evangelism, found in the inclusion of VBS activities for children. Aside from VBSes, volunteers view overt proselytization as an inappropriate addition to the mission trip because it does not create a learning experience on both sides, demonstrating again the importance of reciprocity in volunteers' positionality.

In Chapter Five, issues of neo-colonial critiques and the UMC's and mission leaders' reactions were brought to the forefront. Mission leaders have an awareness of how critiques claiming that these trips are a type of neo-colonial enterprise. Their responses to such critiques range from attempting to vet volunteers to limiting the social media postings to re-designing leader training manuals to take race relations into consideration. However, the lack of language learning on these trips continues to reinforce colonial hierarchies of language and calls into question the relationships built by volunteers. A narrative regarding transformation also emerged through the interviews, which worked as a justification for these trips as long as volunteers were experiencing transformation of some form, either intellectually or socially. This transformation demonstrates the unequal reciprocity of benefits derived from these trips, with volunteer experience taking the forefront.

These mission trips, although aware and reactive to some post-colonial critiques of voluntourism, work to reinforce neo-coloniality through the lack of critical reflection on the nature of

the relationships the build and the spread and reinforcement of hegemonic culture. Although a narrative of reciprocity emerged through the interviews and my analysis, there is an unequal aspect to this reciprocity, which places transformative volunteer experiences above all else and does not account for the power dynamics which places pressure on hosts to enter into relationships. This is not to say that leaders of mission trips and that UMVIM have not made an effort to address concerns that these trips replicate neo-coloniality and white savior narratives, but there is still work to be done in this regard.

As a part of the politics of the everyday, instances of person-to-person interactions of international relations and in this case development work, hold power in how individuals work to reinforce neo-colonial power structures. Although daily life and individual's actions are not always presented as political, these actions effect and work to either undermine or reinforce instances of power. This thesis demonstrated how the volunteers and leaders on short-term mission trips hoped to distance themselves from missionary-evangelizing trips and secular voluntouristic trips by emphasizing the need for reciprocal learning and relationship building. This emphasis on reciprocity subverts existing understandings of how voluntourism functions as a micro-level tool of development by emphasizing the importance of the host communities needs and wants. However, due to existing politics, North-South power relations and Anglo-American hegemonic culture, the relationships and community built through these trips remain inherently political.

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Appendix I: Positionality Statement

As a researcher, I believe that it is important to be as open as possible with how my own experiences have both privileged me and disadvantaged me in my research. No matter how much a researcher attempts to be unbiased, it is impossible to completely separate the researcher from the research, which means that disclosure of our own positionality is of critical importance. In interpretivist research, embracing our own positionality in research is a practice which makes one think critically about what internal and inherent biases we contain due to our own experiences as a member of certain communities and traditions.

In my case, I grew up as a member of the Haddonfield United Methodist Church in southern New Jersey in the United States. A part of the reason which I chose to investigate the UMC as my case study was because of my connections with members of this church, and also because of my connections with the church itself. Being raised in the Church, I was acutely aware of everyone's desire to do good and to help people both within our community and outside of it. As a young woman, I travelled on mission trips to North Carolina, Kentucky and South Dakota, where we helped to build houses, fences, and farmer's market stands, respectively. While on these trips, I experienced the type of trips of which I write about in this thesis from an insider's perspective. Although the trips which I participated on were domestic in nature, I know both family members and friends who took part in trips on the international level. It can also be noted that being an in-group member of the UMC may have given me an increased level of access when talking with my interviewees and an understanding of community specific vocabulary when it comes to not only the functions of the church but also some theological distinctions.

Additionally, as a white woman growing up in a middle-class suburban environment, it was commonplace throughout my childhood and young adulthood to spend time volunteering and helping disadvantaged members of the community. As noted by one of my interviewees, the majority of these

projects are carried out by white, older, middle class individuals from across the US. When examining my own history with this topic, I must also acknowledge my placement as not only an in-group member of the UMC, but also as a member of the demographic that generally partakes in trips such as the ones that I examined as a part of this thesis. In my opinion, this becomes increasingly important to acknowledge as the individuals who generally host the volunteers outside of the US are generally non-white, working class, rural individuals.

Once I began my university studies, I started to study sustainable development as a minor course of study. This is when I first heard of the term "voluntourism" and the critiques of this practice. While living in Uganda in 2015, I remember interacting with a plethora of voluntourists, who were assisting at the clinic in Bushika, Bududa, and witnessing as an outsider the perceptions of these volunteers by the locals. While in Bududa, we also interacted with mission volunteers from the LDS church. This is when I began to think more critically about the work that volunteer tourists travelling abroad for one or two weeks have on the community. So often with these volunteers, my colleagues and I would notice their inappropriate behavior in town, their Instagram posts with the local children seemingly as props and their passion for how this experience really had "changed them." After seeing the ebb and flow of volunteers while in Uganda, I started to think that not only did I need to take a critical approach to examining their actions during their time in Bududa but also to examining my own time in Bubiita, Bududa, where I had been working with a local NGO.

These experiences are all part of what led me to choose this topic for my thesis research. My firsthand knowledge of and connection with the UMC, my experiences on domestic mission trips, my own demographic position and my interactions with voluntourists as an outsider have all influenced the biases and opinions that I could have when approaching this research topic. In some ways, these experiences have given me a privileged position by which I can more easily access the communities involved in these trips etc., but at the same time, it means that my ability to act as an objective party

are less feasible. However, while analyzing and working with this material I am reminded of the Vietnam-era adage: "Dissent is the highest form of patriotism."[122] And with that I find myself having limited hesitation critiquing an organization that I was a part of during my formative years.

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[122] "Dissent Is the Highest Form of Patriotism."