

“It takes a global village”: Troubling discourses of global citizenship in United Planet’s voluntourism

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**Margaret Zeddies**

Independent Researcher, USA

Zsuzsa Millei

University of Tampere, Finland; The University of Newcastle, Australia

Abstract

This article merges the fields of tourism studies with the social studies of children and childhood in a discourse analysis of the voluntourism company *United Planet*’s website. In the past decade, *United Planet* has emerged as a popular voluntourist company with a mission to “unite the world in a community beyond borders.” *United Planet*’s volunteer projects, as described on their website, combine international volunteering with cultural excursions to children living in the Global South. Through our analysis of the *United Planet* website and focusing on notions of childhood, we demonstrate that it constructs a seemingly harmonious transnational world that is without cultural and geographic boundaries and histories. However, the erasure of borders and historical power relations to construct a global community with a form of global citizenship attached to it hinges upon the maintenance of different trajectories and inequalities of Global North and South. In this way, this form of global citizenship contradicts *United Planet*, and voluntourism’s promise about the creation of a more equitable world and limits its membership to the North.

Keywords

Childhood studies, voluntourism, discourse, global citizenship

Introduction

While international aid work focusing on children has been around for decades (Stearns, 2006), it has been furthered by an expanding awareness of the globe in the late 20th century (Smith and Laurie, 2011) and a rise in international awareness of issues that were mostly considered as national, such as the provision of welfare, health and schooling to a nation’s citizens (O’Byrne and Hensby,

Corresponding author:

Margaret Zeddies, Independent Researcher, 9830 Fairfax Square, Apt. 347, Fairfax, VA 22031, USA.

Email: margaretzeddies@gmail.com

2011). The inclusion of volunteer work in the concept of global responsibility is exemplified by official United Nations publications advocating for voluntourism as a part of civil society that balances government and the private sector (Talcott, 2011) and shifts the weight of social responsibility from local governments and nations to non-local actors, such as the Peace Corps (Vrasti, 2013). Indeed, international volunteer work has increased in the past 20 years as part of a reaction to the withdrawal of governments from social services in order to deal with increasing debt and reduced aid budgets brought on in part by neoliberal economic policies (Barnett and Weiss, 2008).

Voluntourism extends the rise in international volunteer work by combining it with the travel and leisure of tourism. In an acknowledgment of growing postcolonial criticisms of tourism, a call has been made for an ethical tourism industry that focuses on coordinating with local organizations and respecting local cultures (Gibson, 2009). Voluntourism has subsequently been hailed by some as alternative tourism (Wearing et al., 2009) and praised as a way to implement positive changes in both tourist and host community, in a similar way to how development work is seen as effecting growth and change through intervention (Pieterse, 2010).

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Global North youth have been progressively encouraged to take part in a global community by embarking upon trips abroad to do volunteer work, much of it involving projects with children and resulting in an estimated 1.6 million participants in voluntourism every year (Guttentag, 2009). Voluntourism is one of the fastest-growing markets in tourism (Lanyado, 2011) with an expanding body of research that critically examines the assumptions and power relations, and neo-colonial processes that voluntourism encapsulates (Benson and Wearing, 2012). In this article, we pay attention to how a voluntourist website uses particular discourses of childhood and produces a transnational world that together assemble a form of citizenship that hinges upon the divisions and different trajectories and inequalities between the Global North and South. We argue that this form of global citizenship contradicts *United Planet's*, and voluntourism's, promise of the creation of a more equitable world community.

Websites are often the first entry point for voluntourists seeking knowledge about volunteering overseas; thus, they contribute to shaping their views about the word and the work they will engage in. The proliferation of voluntourism company websites can be seen as part of increased media exposure in the Global North to poverty in the Global South, which in turn has helped stimulate the rise in volunteering abroad (Barnett and Weiss, 2008). The images and texts on websites contribute to the feeling that the world is more accessible and intimate (Anderson, 1991), producing in the user a sense of borderless and mobility. These mediascapes help construct our reality or imaginaries of the world (Appadurai, 2008).

In an increasingly intimate and globalizing world, children and childhood often emerge as sites of people's hopes and anxieties and as symbols for societies as global connections are negotiated (James et al., 1998). While previous analysis has discussed how discourses of childhood are integral to the production of nationhood (Jenks, 1996), the growing uncertainty of distinctions between the "here" and "there" (Massey, 1994) brings forth new questions for the role of childhood discourses beyond nationhood, in our case the construction of a transnational world and associated citizenship. With the present restructuring of space-time that Massey (1994) referred to, notions of childhood interplay with the production of new imaginaries of the world and our relations within it. National policies referring to global environmental issues, the mass migration of people, or international business envision larger than national communities and they join practical attempts to embed "world citizenship" and international economic entrepreneurship in education and other forms of youth engagements, such as volunteering. As Steger (2009) further explains, "our changing ideational landscape is intimately related to the forces of globalization, defined here as the expansion and intensification of social relations and consciousness across world-time and world space" (p. 2). This ideational landscape also creates particular imaginaries about and responsibilities of what national citizenship extended to the "global" and global justice entail.

Research methodology

In the analysis, we focus on the website of *United Planet*, an American company founded in 2001. As the majority of volunteer tourists come from the Global North to volunteer in Global South (Mostafenazhad, 2012) and due to the high popularity of this company's offerings, this website could be looked at as representative of discourses associated with this global phenomenon without necessarily generalizing the arguments of this article to all companies engaged in forms of voluntourism. *United Planet's* stated premise is to build peace through global relationships by offering volunteer placements with local organizations around the world. Although *United Planet* is a self-described international nonprofit organization, we identify their practices as voluntourism for the following reasons. First, their volunteer Quests, as they are called, highlight cultural excursions, one of the key markers of voluntourism. Second, multiple posts can be found on their blog with the tags "voluntourism"¹ and "volunteer vacation."²

The analysis focuses on the textual elements at play on *United Planet's* website, looking specifically at representations of children and youth from a post-structural perspective. We use this perspective in response to a call for new analytical approaches to tourism (Wearing et al., 2009). From a post-structural perspective, we consider notions of "childhood" as "discursive formations through which ideas, images, and 'knowledges' of children and childhood are conveyed in society" (Alanen, 2001: 12). Discursive formations are sets of knowledges, ideas, and language fused with social practices and institutions that codify and constitute social practices and contribute to how we think about the world and what we accept as true (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). Discourses contain signs, or representations, that draw meaning from their relationships to other signs, which are temporary and can be changed, generating new meanings (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002).

In our analysis, we paid attention to how different knowledges about children and childhood and a transnational world are produced and what these knowledges and associated discourses do by positioning voluntourists and children in particular ways. We also examined power relations embedded in these discursive constructions and positionings (Foucault, 1972). We used Laclau and Mouffe's concept of "nodal points" as applied by Jorgensen and Phillips (2002), to untangle discursive formations. Nodal points are prominent, privileged signs around which other signs acquire meaning and which momentarily fix meaning, reducing other possible meanings to create a discourse. Their theory has been useful in the analysis of media as nodal points and discursive formation "not just passively expressing or reflecting social phenomena, or as sites where discourses merely circulate, but [work] as specific machineries that produce, reproduce and transform social phenomena" (Carpentier and Spinoy, 2008: 17), in our case the global flows of tourists, the production of knowledge about children in the Global South, a transnational world and the continuing hegemony of colonialism.

The data used in this analysis were the result of an initial 3-month collection period and subsequent reexaminations of a multi-layered, ever-changing Internet text. As our research question investigated how children and the world were constructed on the website, we targeted child-focused projects and representations. We identified three dominant concepts of childhood used on the *United Planet's* website which became our three nodal points: first, the "Romantic child" and relationships of care between voluntourist and child; second, the "future child" and the production of child and place as "developing"; and third, the "universal child" and the homogenization of child and place.

United Planet's' production of relationships beyond borders

United Planet's discourse articulates a transnational world through text and imagery, exemplified by a promotional event described as "United Planet Day":

United Planet Day: Sharing a Moment in Time ... held on the fall equinox, when the sun is ... shining on every location on Earth for an equal amount of time. This once a year occurrence represents United Planet's mission of fostering mutual understanding, improving the quality of life for everyone, and creating harmony among the people of the world.³

This text evokes an image of a flat world temporarily offering equal opportunity to all without divisions. This theme is repeated on the "Destinations" page where a world map's continents are filled in with blue and completely lacking borders.⁴ It is also present in the map across the top of each page⁵ where countries' borders appear as faintly white with *United Planet's* logo and the phrase "a community beyond borders" superimposed over them. The symbolic erasing of borders is a central principle in the construction of a transnational world that includes all peoples, "proximate or distant" (James, 2014: xvi), "a global civil society of different peoples, communities and individuals, considered as one" (p. X).

United Planet establishes a kind of "Relational Diplomacy—recognizing that the relationship between people of diverse backgrounds is the basic building block for uniting the world,"⁶ as it declares in its mission statement and repeats in a bright orange slogan at the top of the home page reading: "United Planet: Building a Better World, One Relationship at a Time."⁷ At the same time as totalizing the world as a "global civil society," these statements and images qualify the potentiality of change by making it as the sum of singular relationships. In this way, civil society is assembled from individual change agents, and the change brought forward is the sum of changes made by each voluntourist. However, in this "geographical stretching-out of social relations" as Massey (1994: 147) describes it, to what extent does this transnational world "represent very much a western, colonizer's view" (p. 147) and liberal notion of the agent as a separated individual from its nation and its histories or other social relations? In answer to this, the positioning of the voluntourist throughout the examples discussed below establishes a form of global governance in which the Global North is dominant but in a renewed form. *United Planet's* "community" means a group composed of individual agents bound by similar interests or quest to make the world better. By emphasizing the hegemony of youths from the Global North as the main actors or citizens in the "community beyond borders," the images foreground North America and Europe. Voluntourists' responsibility to "better the world" this way is extended to the globe, while Global South children are denied the possibility and responsibility for action. They remain passive, and their communities persist as places of reception for the voluntourist's help. Global South children consequently are constructed as the "second-class" citizens of the world. As part of this structuring, "stretched" relationships between global North and South children emerge as pivotal to this discourse, as exemplified by the picture accompanying the text about Relational Diplomacy of a smiling voluntourist youth with his arms around children from the Global South.

The children and voluntourists in *United Planet's* images are marked as Global South or North by signifiers such as ethnicity, dress, and setting. Relationships with children are highly valued by voluntourists (Conran, 2011), as demonstrated by interviews with *United Planet* voluntourists who cite working with children as one of the most enjoyable aspects of their Quest: "Getting to know the children at the orphanage and being able to spend as much time with them as I wanted,"⁸ and "playing games and reading books with the local village children."⁹ While children have often been used as a symbol of common humanity (Holland, 1992), the relationships between voluntourist and child continue the discourse of North actor and South receiver by utilizing the discourse of the Romantic child. Drawing upon the notions of childhood expressed by 18th-century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, this discourse holds that children have an innate innocence that is almost preordained (Richardson, 1999) and therefore must be protected at all costs. Childhood according to the Romantic discourse is a time of freedom, play, and spontaneity (Montgomery, 2003), reflected in the statements

above where voluntourists describe games with children. In this discourse, children represent “innocence, the need to be nurtured, authenticity and hope for the future” (Gullestad, 2007: 154), a concept still prevalent in contemporary North American and Western European societies (James et al., 1998).

The discourse of protection and care extends through voluntourists’ descriptions of their relationships, where photos of them hugging Global South children accompany some statements: “The girls at the orphanage were amazing and I am so glad that they became a part of my life. I also chose to sponsor a little girl in one of the villages.”¹⁰ The children in this text are cited as valuable for the emotional connection they provide to the voluntourist, who already includes them as part of their family metaphorically and also literally through sponsorship. It is easy for the voluntourist to assume the position of caretaker since there is no mention of adult figures in the children’s lives. The mediation of the idea of “global social orphan” (Cartwright, 2005: 199) becomes even more prominent when the Global North voluntourist is positioned as the rescuer of “the child at risk in states incapable of providing adequate care and protection” (Cartwright, 2005: 201). The construction of “the child” that needs saving by an international community positions the voluntourist as a global citizen responsible for the well-being and education of the “South child.” *United Planet* presents voluntourists in parental positions with host community children seated on their laps and in embraces.¹¹ *United Planet* uses the Romantic discourse of childhood to make the relationships between North and South actors seem unproblematic and “natural” in an appeal to the voluntourist consumer.

While *United Planet*’s discourse describes “Relational Diplomacy” as facilitating global movement, this global mobility is a specifically Global North one. It is only the voluntourist who is empowered by the borderless world and facilitated by relationships with Global South children, who are themselves described as immobile by a voluntourist quoted on the website:

Leaving was one of the hardest things that I had to do. It was hard to leave the children with tears in their eyes, telling me to take them with me. I would have in a heart beat. I became really close and attached to many of them. I know that I’ll be going back to Ghana. Going back to ... the orphanage. I want to see how my kids are doing.¹²

In an emotionally charged relationship with the children, often critiqued in relation to humanitarian imaginaries (Chouliaraki, 2010), the voluntourist “leaves” and returns to the children, implying that while the children want to leave with the voluntourist, they are unable to do so. In a similar vein, but expressing the promise of social mobility, the voluntourist is depicted as “discovering” the hidden qualities of Global South children: “I fell in love with eager, bright, brilliant boys I taught in the slum.”¹³ The discovery and education provided by a transnational agent creates opportunities to break out from one’s economic circumstances and offers intellectual nurturing and hope for the future.

Despite the initial appearance of a transnational civil society made more intimate through personal relationships and a seemingly equal ground of belonging, modernist binaries are still re-created by *United Planet*’s discourse. In a complex positioning of the “needed” and “needy,” “adult” and “child,” “beings” (adults) and “becomings” (children) (Qvortrup, 1994), a “developed” subject and a “non-developed” object emerge (Manzo, 2008). This discourse relies upon the premise that adulthood represents a time of maturity and competence, and that childhood is a series of developmental steps toward this future state (Burman, 1994). Children in this discourse represent a state of what Lee (2001) calls “incompleteness” (p. 461), defined by their presumed lack of adult qualities rather than being defined by what qualities they do possess. Because of this perceived lack, children are constructed as being passively dependent on adults and in a development period when they “need” to play unaffected by adult-kind responsibilities. The enduring or “sedimented” (as Laclau

and Mouffe refer to it in Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 36) nature of this discourse appears as a nodal point in *United Planet's* global community discourse. The “needy” children on *United Planet's* website are not depicted as suffering any more, a common trope in aid work that is strongly criticized (Holland, 1992). The image and discourse of the “needy” and becoming child with potentialities depending on the Global North adult are popular in aid work (Boyden and Mann, 2005) and now also in voluntourism. However, this discourse maintains a dynamic that ends up repeating Orientalist discourses wherein Orientals were seen as “problems to be solved or confined” (Said, 1978: 207).

The positioning of the Global North voluntourist by *United Planet's* discourse depends on the construct of the Global South child. The Romantic construction of childhood invoked in these discourses helps to further elaborate on this relationality spanning the globe. Youth from the North are positioned as agentic and mobile global citizens, while agency is denied for the immobile children of the South who need nurturance and care due to their immaturity, neediness, and lack of opportunities and potentials. They can only be on the receiver end of this relationship. This relationality also clearly shifts social responsibility from the nation state located on the South to global citizens from the North to take care of these “global social orphans” and offer them possibilities to make themselves more like their North companion.

Developing child and place

Global South children are being represented as objects of development, and Quest destinations are depicted as places of development. Quests entail “volunteering in a developing country,”¹⁴ and voluntourists’ participation in these projects is described as having “an impact on a community in need.”¹⁵ The voluntourist is further positioned as the developer through descriptions wherein a voluntourist can “raise up the community in the long-term”¹⁶ and “enrich lives of our neighbors worldwide.”¹⁷ The term “neighbors” again references a transnational community in which neighbors live close to one another without geographical borders and share common concerns. However, on *United Planet's* website, the voluntourist is positioned as the agent of change who possesses the skills to be “engaging in societal challenges”¹⁸ while the “undeveloped” actors in the Global South are depicted more passively.

United Planet's construction of destinations as places in need of development contain an articulation of poverty as being unspoiled, a tactic often used in tourism (Scheyvens, 2011). Analogous to how the child represents authenticity (Gullestad, 2007), places are similarly depicted as being authentic. One Costa Rican host family is described as being “genuine, and pure Tico, right down to the rice and beans we ate three times a day ...”¹⁹ Another text describes the Quest thusly:

It's a chance for travelers to see what it's really like to work and live in a community—and to have an impact on a community in need. It's about sharing a cup of tea in a dusty market, laughing with a family over a bowl of rice, getting a hug from an orphan.²⁰

This example contains several signs. Quest destinations or “local” places are constructed as a place to “see what it's really like” to be in a community, establishing it as authentic in the eyes of the voluntourist. The “dusty market,” the welcoming places of family and orphanages where the voluntourist has access to, link to signs related to undeveloped (unregulated) places, but are here romanticized. In this construction, the authenticity of Global South places is linked to simplicity disguising poverty. Another quote from a *United Planet* voluntourist describes the “simple life,” accompanied by a picture of children standing on a dirt hill outside cement and metal houses.²¹ Children have often been used to signify the future and childhood also calls up nostalgia for the past that was more secure or happy (Jenks, 1994). Indeed, for the American

voluntourist, “the past is usually another country” (Appadurai, 2008: 50). Other countries and other children are depicted as a throwback to a mythic past when times were simpler and happier, when close communities’ relations existed that safeguarded people from the intensity and risks of neoliberal globalization (Bauman, 2001). Another testimonial from a voluntourist elsewhere on the site states, “I left all fear behind when I repelled [*sic*] down the Rajmachi fort while trekking in the rain; I visited some of the holiest places in all of India and was awestruck by all that I found around me.”²² This nostalgia is invoked through voluntourists’ descriptions of their volunteer experiences wherein “life is simple, but so very beautiful. I felt loved by every single person ... the kids had such warm hearts and open arms” (accompanied by more images of smiling children from the host community),²³ and “although living conditions are simple, their lives and hearts are full and they live with dignity.”²⁴ Through this articulation of the Global South as uncorrupted, poor, authentic places creates a “packaged poverty” (Hancock, 1989: 119) for the purposes of tourism, exoticizing geographies, and peoples and connecting with the Global North tourists’ longing for happiness and belonging.

By using the binaries of simple/developed, local/global, and unspoiled/corrupted and counterposing relationships as fulfilling/emptied out and authentic/inauthentic shaped by processes, discourses, and feelings brought about by the intensification of life, consumerism, and globalizing processes contribute to conditioning the duties and responsibilities of voluntourist global citizens to bring about particular futures. These discourses do not only constrain being and becoming for children located on the South, but also prescribe certain responsibilities for the voluntourist of the North. They mark out what global citizenship could be and should be about, that is, to bring about a future not corrupted by neoliberal globalization through learning from the South, which is only possible if the South remains uncorrupted and therefore underdeveloped, welcoming, and close-knit communities.

Homogenization, depoliticization, and commodification of geographies and childhoods

While Global South children and places are depicted as in need of development on *United Planet*’s website, they are also depicted as generic and welcoming. The previously discussed representations of places and children in the Global South as being simple but authentic also contribute to the construction of children as non-specific. Representations of children in aid work have been criticized for their homogeneity (Glauser, 1997) and for their effect of depoliticizing power relations created by the global hegemony (Burman, 1994). The concept of a universal childhood, disseminated in international documents, such as the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), creates a standard of childhood that draws heavily upon understandings of the Global North (Stephens, 1995). This discourse and associated practices of children’s protection, provisioning, and participation have also been perpetuated as universal through aid appeals and inter-governmental organizations (Boyden, 1997). They created a standard of childhood that abstracts the diversity and contextual contingency of children’s lives into a monolithic, global standard. This construction of a standard has the effect of naturalizing one particular conception of childhood, and stigmatizing any aberration, instead of considering how childhoods vary in different contexts. The discourse of the authentic, universal child likewise exoticizes the Global South child as the “Other” (Mostafenazhad, 2012; Said, 1978).

United Planet uses the idea of a universal childhood in its definition of AIDS orphans, for example. “Orphanage work” is a category that voluntourists can select on the website by clicking on a drop-down menu on the main page. While orphans are described as in abundance and abandoned (“... large numbers of deaths from HIV/AIDS every year, in turn leading to many HIV/AIDS

orphans" (emphasis in original),²⁵ specifics of these orphans' lives are lost in this portrayal. For example, children titled as orphans on a South Africa Quest may in practice live with at least one adult or being cared for by extended family through common child fostering practices (Meintjes and Giese, 2006). Yet, none of these variations are explained on the website, nor do voluntourists' stories mention developing an awareness of this. Instead, *United Planet* presents simplistic definitions of orphans and street children and as lacking adult carers, without consideration for the complex realities and relationships their circumstances entail. For example, the picture of children used on the page describing "the simple life" is also used on a page describing a project in Mozambique, and then, it is found again on a page describing a project in Ghana.²⁶ Another image of a child is used on a page describing a voluntourist's experience in Tibet, and then again on the country page for Chile.²⁷ By homogenizing children and places on the website, *United Planet* employs Laclau and Mouffe's concept of the logic of equivalence (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002) in which identities are formed by subsuming others into one category, easily reducing peoples into binary opposites of Global North and South.

Homogenization also has the effect of depoliticizing people and places. There is a delicate balance between constructing the child and place as familiar but substantially different to raise interest. While there is an emphasis on places and children as being poor and undeveloped, they must at the same time be familiar and safe enough for the voluntourist. Turbulent political pasts may be referred to but then followed by a statement that neatly resolves this history and reconstructs the location in positive terms, appealing to the tourist: "The country returned to peace in 1996 and is a popular tourist destination."²⁸ The Global South place appears this way as non-threatening, providing "authentic (but safe) experiences" (Whyte et al., 2011: 337). One voluntourist describes the immersion into local culture by saying, "I really felt like I was a Tibetan! I got to hang out with monks, ride motorcycles, cook Tibetan food, walk freely around the town, and even spoke a little Tibetan to local townspeople"(see Note 29). The possibility of "going native" simplifies the tradition and erases the history of place. It reduces place to an esthetic and momentary experience with no mention of political upheaval and years of brutality.

Despite optimism about voluntourism being a new form of ethical tourism that aims to bring about change (Wearing et al., 2009), these practices depoliticize and commodify the volunteer experience in the process, including places located on the South and children themselves. This homogenization of place facilitates an easier cultural immersion for the voluntourist, evoking Pieterse's (2010) writing on how marketization practices homogenize the object of consumption. *United Planet's* mission page describes its projects as facilitating "global understanding on a local level," or by "immersing you in local culture as you do your part to create a global community."³⁰ However, the eradication of the history of the South, including colonialism (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992), turns on its head this claim. *United Planet* rather uncritically imposes a global worldview onto the local. *United Planet's* discourse of "global understanding," like Cooper's (2005) concerns about globalization, "seems to be about space, but ... ends up glossing over the mechanisms and limitations of spatial relationships" (p. 190). The homogenous representation of children and places of the Global South on *United Planet's* website reassures the voluntourist that a global community unites all people for the possibility of a happier future for all. Depoliticizing and homogenizing the voluntourist experience in discourses and images works to empty those historically entrenched power relations from the personal relations of voluntourists with "locals." Without awareness to these historical and structural inequalities, the personal relationship created maintains the economic, political, and social "backwardness" of the South. Through sanitized personal relations, the voluntourist global citizen's work remains simple and can proceed in an unproblematic way by following dominant trajectories of development and progress that characterize modernity.

Discussion

Without generalizing our analysis of the website to other similar sites and organizations, we argue that *United Planet*, by adopting dominant discourses of Global North childhoods and modernist development discourses in relation to children and world economies, and by homogenizing and depoliticizing communities, constructs particular “desired” relations and agendas for voluntourists. Playing upon notions of the possibility of a transnational world and community, *United Planet* attempts to present a particular worldview and trajectory to voluntourists looking to become global citizens and partaking in social justice projects. By focusing on voluntourists’ individual relationships with vulnerable children in need of development and a childhood like the one possible on the Global North, *United Planet* attempts to position the voluntourist not as a new colonizer whose relations with the children of the Global South are vested with particular power relations and global agendas, but as a helpful “neighbor.” Depictions of voluntourists and children, however, are bound up with “the cultural politics of images of Northern and Southern children and of the models of North-South relations that underlie them” (Burman, 1994: 30). In fact, the website entrenches power relations between Global North and South, rather than dismantling them. The concealment of power relations happens particularly through visual and written representations that utilize paternalistic devices and professing to be about equality (Manzo, 2008) while portraying and maintaining the Global South as dependent.

The representations of places and people based on historical power relations re-create binaries of difference (Simpson, 2004). Similarly, *United Planet*’s website employs discursive strategies that at first seem to be about a transnational community to which everyone equally belongs, but end up maintaining distinct and separate groups of mobile voluntourists and immobile children, designating them with uneven symbolic functions in a forum that focuses on the advancement of the voluntourist more than it does for the South child. The voluntourist needs the Global South child (Hannerz, 1990) in order to complete the voluntourists’ transformation into becoming a particular kind of global citizen. *United Planet*’s representational practice has “less to do with the Orient than it does with ‘our’ world” (Said, 1978: 12). *United Planet*’s production of global youth from the North and “stuck” children from the South works to reinscribe the hegemony of colonial powers by utilizing discourses of childhood and to naturalize the colonizer-colonized relationship between Global North and South (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). Discourses and constructions of childhoods utilized on the United Planet website exploit the Global South in a different way and give particular mandates to global citizens. They invoke an imaginary of a “safe and authentic community”—present and should be preserved in the South—that has the potential to provide security to the volunteer and the Global North in an insecure world brought about by the injustices of neoliberal globalization.

Keeping in mind the idea that the subaltern can speak (Spivak, 1988) and that children in the Global South are also social agents (Ansell, 2009), our aim in this article was to describe the ways in which *United Planet* constructs a particular kind of global citizenship and limits its membership to the youth of global North. In this way, the same way as citizenship is limited to certain nationals, global citizenships is constructed as limited to the Global North. Together with the above argument, this limited membership is not only troubling to the notion of *global* citizenship, which supposed to be inclusive of the global community, but the social justice project and hope attached to it is also curtailed and channeled to maintain historical power relations and inequalities and funneled toward a future that is imagined and only possible for the global citizens of the North.

Authors’ note

The United Planet website has been updated since the analysis was completed. Therefore some of the URLs and associated images discussed in the paper are no longer available.

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Notes

1. <http://www.unitedplanet.org/blog/2012/11/08/lessons-from-romania>; <http://www.unitedplanet.org/blog/2012/10/11/top-3-winter-break-quest-destinations>; <http://www.unitedplanet.org/volunteer-in-south-africa>
2. <http://www.unitedplanet.org/blog/2010/09/09/notes-from-ghana-the-difference-between-a-tourist-and-a-volunteer>; <http://www.unitedplanet.org/travel-agent-information>; <http://www.unitedplanet.org/ckfinder/userfiles/files/adventure%20flyer%20low-res.pdf>
3. <http://www.unitedplanet.org/united-planet-day>
4. <http://www.unitedplanet.org/destinations>
5. <http://www.unitedplanet.org>
6. <http://www.unitedplanet.org/mission>
7. <http://www.unitedplanet.org/>
8. <http://www.unitedplanet.org/international-volunteer-story-herries>
9. <http://www.unitedplanet.org/international-volunteer-story-bell>
10. <http://www.unitedplanet.org/international-volunteer-story-hobelman>
11. <http://www.unitedplanet.org/destinations>
12. <http://www.unitedplanet.org/aimee-dillon-volunteer-ghana>
13. <http://www.unitedplanet.org/volunteer-abroad-testimonials>
14. <http://www.unitedplanet.org/travel-agent-information>
15. <http://www.unitedplanet.org/destinations>
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Author biographies

Margaret Zeddies earned her M.Phil. in Childhood Studies from the Norwegian Centre for Child Research at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. She has taught youth and young adults in South Korea, Palestine, and Michigan, and is currently working on child labor projects in the international development sector. Her research interests include transnational youth and the social construction of place-based identities through travel and voluntourism.

Zsuzsa Millei is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the *Space and Political Agency Research Group (SPARG)* at the University of Tampere, Finland (2015–2016), and Senior Lecturer at the School of Education, The University of Newcastle, Australia. Her research examines the ways in which constitutions of “the child” and childhood shift in concert with the changing problematizations about the government of population and individuals. Zsuzsa understands early education as a political practice and uses interdisciplinary frameworks and methodologies to understand how children are positioned and participate as political subjects and how children’s political subjectivities are formed.