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Seeing the World Through Their Eyes: How Peace Corps and its Volunteers Confront the Universalism/Particularism Continuum

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ABSTRACT

John Kennedy's Cold War agenda advanced a vision of liberal developmentalism in which Americans would seek to understand and respect a developing nation's culture while simultaneously educating those nations about American culture. Over the past nearly 50 years, the Peace Corps have sent eager volunteers into welcoming nations as an extension of this developmental agenda. In the post-Cold War era and beyond, Peace Corps' recruitment rhetoric has both reinforced and rejected these ideals of US foreign policy. A rhetorical analysis of Peace Corps recruitment images and volunteer photographs, magnifies the disconnect between developmental policy and the role of Foreign Service from the perspective of the organization and from the volunteer in the field, suggesting that the persistence of the mono-dimensional development policy of the 1960s simplifies our multi-faceted representation of the underdeveloped world in the 21st century.

KEYWORDS

Peace Corps, Visual rhetoric, Voluntarism, Universalism, Particularism

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At two o'clock in the morning on October 24, 1960, Presidential candidate John F. Kennedy revealed his idea for the Peace Corps to a crowd of University of Michigan students. That night on the steps of the Student Union Building, Kennedy began to harness the enthusiasm and optimism of a nation putting World War II behind itself. The youth of America—for whom the news of battles and the sacrifices of wartime were either vague memories or written and oral history—were raised on newsreels showing the slow and painful recovery of a war-torn Europe. The combination created a young generation eager to help. Kennedy's youthful exuberance, winning looks, and idealistic words made the Peace Corps seem like a logical next step in this process of healing. Simultaneously, Cold War tensions weighed heavily. The impending threat of the atomic bomb meant that Americans had the options either to stay at home and wait for the giant flashbulb in the sky or to do something to make things better.

Five months later, in his January 1961, inaugural address, President Kennedy's vision of a federally-sponsored volunteer program remained a top priority. He challenged a new generation of Americans to join "a grand and global alliance" to fight tyranny, poverty, disease, and war. "To those peoples in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery," he said, "we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves" (Kennedy, 1961). And on March 1, 1961, President Kennedy signed Executive Order 10924 establishing the Peace Corps.

By 1963, newspapers reported stories of Peace Corps volunteers headed off to serve underdeveloped nations. Television hosts invited volunteers to appear for interviews on national nightly news. Public service announcements publicized *the toughest job you'll ever love.* And Norman Rockwell depicted the spirit of service through his Peace Corps paintings, capturing the spirit of the 1960s. Leo Cecchini (2009), a volunteer in Ethiopia in the early 1960s notes that, "The Peace Corps hit the world stage with a bang and became the thing to do. . . . It even achieved instant

status as a folklore icon through the paintings of the great Norman Rockwell. And who were we? Indeed, we were 'Norman Rockwell Americans'" (para. 3). Rockwell's most famous Peace Corps painting depicted the first volunteer group sent to Ethiopia. This image of President Kennedy, surrounded by the new volunteers, appeared on the cover of *Look* magazine in 1966. Today, Rockwell's painting, *JFKs Legacy*, displayed in every Peace Corps office around the globe, romanticizes a forward-looking President and ready volunteers. This image captures the spirit of the 1960s *new frontier* rhetoric (Dorsey, 1996).

March 1, 2011, marked the Peace Corps' 50th anniversary, and the organization celebrated its success as the longest standing Foreign Service organization in the United States. Over the past 50 years, more than 200,000 volunteers have served in 139 countries around the world. During the 1960s volunteer numbers reached all-time highs with more than 14,000 volunteers in service per year. In the decades that followed, volunteer numbers and funding steadily decreased, permitting about half as many volunteers to commit to service than did in the 1960s. Kennedy's *new frontier* rhetoric and idealism faded with his death and the presidents who followed did not always carry the same vision of the developing world. As economic times changed, and the Cold War carried on, the US strategy on development failed to encourage service as a means to peace; however, the Peace Corps maintains the same values as it did when Kennedy created the organization.

While the official goals of the organization remain tied to their Cold War contexts, volunteers often offer differing views of their mission. These differences become particularly clear in the visual images the organization and the volunteers produce. In this essay, I investigate the ways the official Peace Corps rhetoric and the rhetoric of Peace Corps volunteers diverge. By attending to recruitment photos used by the Peace Corps and the photographs produced by Peace Corps volunteers, I argue that the official discourse uses universalizing rhetorics that reinforce a

mono-dimensional, Cold War vision of the non-U.S. world while 21st century volunteer images embrace rhetorics of particularism to create a multi-dimensional view of development.

In the first section of this essay I will trace the ways the Peace Corps developed in response to Cold War imperatives. I will then briefly consider the differences between universalizing and particularizing rhetorics and consider visual manifestations of these rhetorics. I then turn to an analysis of official and volunteer images as examples of how official images remain indebted to Cold War imperatives while the volunteers resist these universalizing narratives. I conclude by advocating a universal/particular rhetorical continuum that allows us to contemplate the complexity of visual discourse in framing the developing world.

Cold War Policies and the Peace Corps

The New Frontier image crafted by the Kennedy administration in 1961 included the institution or support of several different programs aligned with the ideals of liberal-developmentalism and a progressive Cold War strategy. Amongst the New Frontier measures such as Food for Peace and the Alliance for Progress in Latin America, the Peace Corps gained instantaneous popularity and fulfilled Kennedy's campaign promises to extend the American Dream to developing nations. According to Gerard T. Rice (1985), "Kennedy felt that there was a great fund of idealism in America waiting to be harnessed and discharged for a noble cause. The Peace Corps was his way of demonstrating the reality of this idealism to the world" (p. 26). In his book, *The Bold Experiment: JFK's Peace Corps*, Rice termed this the *Kennedian spirit* which captured the 1960s spirit of voluntarism and grassroots organizing.

The rhetorical framework in which Kennedy couched his vision of the organization in 1961 took as its major tenet idealism. Addressing those assembled for the signing of the Executive Order, the President said,

> But if the life will not be easy, it will be rich and satisfying. For every young American who participates in the Peace Corps—who works in a foreign land—will know that he or she is sharing in the great common task of bringing to man that decent way of life which is the foundation of freedom and a condition of peace. (Kennedy, 1961)

Kennedy's speeches focused on the difficult challenge that would lead to peace for all of humanity. The Peace Corps would be the connection between cultures and nations.

Kennedy's Cold War policies and New Frontier rhetoric, in part, helped him win the election over Richard Nixon in 1960. Those policies included a Cold War strategy toward the developing world of liberal-developmentalism. Emily Rosenburg (1982), in *Spreading the American Dream*, argues that liberal-developmentalism is an ideological belief that other nations can and should strive to replicate America's developmental strategies. These strategies include: free enterprise, open access for trade, free flow of information and culture, and the acceptance that governmental activity is conducted for the protection of the private enterprise while stimulating and regulating participation in economic and cultural exchange (p. 7). Kennedy's idea for the Peace Corps was born out of a universalizing assumption that all humans, everywhere, seek the brand of development used by the United States and through his New Frontier rhetoric, he persuaded a nation of willing volunteers to spread development just as it had spread from the Eastern to Western parts of America (Dorsey, 1996, p. 55).

After his election, Kennedy removed himself from the detailed planning of the Peace Corps, leaving the development of the organization to his brother-in-law, Sargent Shriver. By March of 1961, Shriver and his staff had a comprehensive plan for the Peace Corps. However, Shriver purposefully avoided latching on to Kennedy's Cold War policies and aligned his methods for development with what he considered to be the most modern liberal development ideas of the day

(Shriver, 1964). He defined the Peace Corps' strategy as the promotion of "universal humanistic values while at the same time respecting particular cultural attributes" (Fischer, 1998, p. 16). Shriver's unifying of universal rights and individual cultural inheritances demonstrated his understanding of development as complex and multi-dimensional. Rather than relying solely on universal values, as Kennedy expected, Shriver expanded the Peace Corps' mission by articulating each developing nation as a unique set of people with individual cultural practices that deserved to be honored and respected.

Supported by his sophisticated view of development, Shriver defined the Peace Corps' mission and outlined three goals which still exist today. With the articulation of clear goals, thousands of eager volunteers joined the Peace Corps. As volunteers participated in extensive training and entered their respective host countries, they quickly realized that the ideals of development supported by the Peace Corps' administration seemed unrealistic and limiting when put into practice. The volunteers' individual experiences taught them that development was far more complicated than their training courses suggested. Fritz Fischer (1998) argues that the Peace Corps' universal approach to development immediately proved problematic in that it failed to include the particularist approach imagined by Shriver (p. 17).

Following the harsh realization that development was not as simple as the organization suggested, volunteers began finding new ways to work alongside their foreign counterparts. Ignoring efforts to promote sameness amongst cultures, the volunteers highlighted differences and qualities unique to each individual country, village, and experience. This intimate approach to service found volunteers sharing their stories through letters, journals, and photographs mailed to families and friends. Over the past five decades, the Peace Corps and its volunteers have continually

grappled with strategies of development that were aligned with the universalist struggles the nation endured in its dealings with other nations.

Visualizing Globalization

The myth of universalism involves an ignorance of history and a privileging of sameness. There is a belief that what is good and true can be discovered, defined, and applied to every situation (Donnelly, 2003). Whereas with a particularist worldview, unique circumstances and relationships are more important than abstract rules concerning right or wrong. Gerard Hauser (2008) argues that "universalist arguments typically favor Western over non-Western or Third World cultural practices" (p. 450). Traditionally, we have associated Western cultures and the Peace Corps as universalist while in the case of the volunteers, they rely on particularism.

Through modernization theory, the myth of development throughout the 20th century tends to be a-historical and treats individuals and nation-states equally. The universalizing ideal of development encourages less developed nations to act as more developed nations do. Modernization theory holds that both the economic development and the psychology of a people will conform to Western ideals (Chirot & Hill, 1982, p. 81). This bleeds into Westernized perceptions of development that ignore the particular values and cultural codes that create difference and diversity. In the case of the Peace Corps, universalizing images rule the organization's rhetorical landscape. In this context, development blends all cultures and communities together as one, blurring the line between individual nations. As Roland Barthes (1972) suggests, visual myths, such as those created by the Peace Corps, create a memorializing feature of the visual (p. 122). This myth of universalism embeds itself within the viewer through systems of cultural representation. The danger of cultural representation is that it can easily stand in for more complex views of the other,

jeopardizing the cultural integrity of less developed nations. Particularism comes as an attempt to preserve cultural difference while the West clings to universalism as a tool of development.

Often, the myth of particularism is understood as being born out of the logic of human relationships. In this way, cultural stereotypes and rigid systematized categorizations of norms are avoided in favor of the flexibility of process over product (Alford, 1992). Particularism is upheld as the antithesis of universalism and in some cases, privileged for its ability to preserve cultural identities, but the critique of particularism holds that it may at times be too narrowing, too limiting, and unproductive as a result. Hauser (2008) argues with respect to human rights discourse that particularism runs the risk of focusing on the norms, beliefs, and values of a specific culture rather on larger, broader human or social rights. He states that "cultural relativism neither supports meaningful dialogue over change nor promotes arguments that will be regarded as sensible outside their own frames of reference" (p.451). While volunteer experiences of a particularist nature have the potential to be too limiting, volunteers typically balance the universal with the particular.

The particularism embraced by Peace Corps volunteers demonstrates respect for cultural plurality and couches each community and each nation as unique and valuable because of its individual qualities and characteristics. Within a particularist rhetoric, volunteers tend to value their experience as individuals while at the same time recognizing the universality of service related to their own experience as Westerners. This multi-dimensional view of voluntarism and development demonstrate the sophistication of the volunteer perspective. Both the volunteer perspective and the organization's image of the developing world can be read through the visual rhetoric embedded in online photographs. Collectively, these images demonstrate the complexity of development work and the power of the visual to construct realities.

The power of the visual to reinforce universalizing and particularizing rhetorics is bound in their relationship to overarching narratives about culture. Raymond Williams (1982) argues that culture is "the signifying system through which necessarily (though among other means) a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored" (p. 1). Because culture is the means by which we understand the world around us, the analysis of visual images invites a further understanding of our American view of the developing world.

Peace Corps' photographic images, have significant potential for altering our unrealistic views of indigenous peoples but generally they reinforce stereotypes of developing nations. The Peace Corps has a tendency to idealize the people of developing nations, with an accompanying tendency to ignore poverty and violence. The photographs show these people as cut off from the flow of world events, living peacefully in traditional ways. Lutz and Collins (1993) argue that questions of race, ethnic identity, gender, and class are often asked as a means to understand how representations help to create and reproduce social hierarchy. They suggest that the other in Western media is quite often "portrayed as *exotic*; they are *idealized*; they are *naturalized*; and taken out of all but a single historical narrative; and they are *sexualized*" (p. 89). Traditionally Peace Corps photographs serve to reinforce this universalizing narrative by ignoring the complexities of everyday life. Anxiety about threats of chaos or decay does not exist in the photographs; rather they depict an ideal world, free from suffering. In these photographs, hard work and responsibility are downplayed, while the world's peoples become aesthetic objects to appreciate (Lutz & Collins, p. 95).

We can recognize images as a means of public identity. We know who we are in contrast to those who we are not. Hariman and Lucaites (2003) articulate this point by stating that "the public sphere depends on visual rhetorics to maintain not only its play of deliberative 'voices,' but also its

more fundamental constitution of public identity" (p. 36). They argue that the public is a body of strangers grouped discursively through and addressed by the public image. Forces like the Peace Corps provide people with a collective representation of a culture. The organization is responsible for offering the public an idealized face of the non-Western world as a means of justifying the work they do abroad. The images examined in this essay taken as a collective unit tell an important and complicated story of development. The value of these images lies in the narrative they tell and the conversation they provoke.

Reinforcing Universalism

In the 1960s, Sargent Shriver recognized the potential pitfalls of universal representation; however, as the organization expanded to serve many countries, they simultaneously failed to broaden the image of the non-West to the American people. An analysis of visual images used by the organization reveals identifiable attempts at universalism. The underlying question becomes, what reinforces universal values? With respect to the Peace Corps, the answer lies within the images used by the organization to communicate their work to the Western viewer. The images used for the purposes of rhetorical analysis are taken from the Peace Corps official web site (www.peacecorps.org). Amongst these images we find themes of universalism within the sanitation of scenery, an exoticizing of the other, a developed sense of helplessness, and finally, non-Western worlds in the process of Westernization.

One of the most remarkable features of Peace Corps' photography is the sharp focus on the incredible scenery of the natural environment. The captured forest, mountain, beach, and desert scenery display amazingly vibrant colors. The print advertisements used by the organization for recruitment contain mountains, gorgeous village huts, and children at play in the ocean. A call to adventure is readily visible through many and varied representations of nature and makes service in

a foreign country look like a wonderful vacation. We do not see buildings or populated cityscapes in any of the pictures; the photos are limited to the beauty of the land in rural areas. Many developing countries have enormous problems with waste disposal and littering; however, this reality is never presented. In images found on the official web site, the natural world is always pristine and attractive to the viewer making development more palatable.

Figure 1 – A screenshot from a Peace Corps web page

Not only do these natural images create a beautiful and safe world, illustrations of nature create the idea of a foreign land where natural, untouched beauty conjures images of pre-modern peoples living in pre-modern conditions. Mark Meister (1997) argues that displays of natural beauty

in landscapes are of consequence "because they act as a signifying system through which a social system is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored. The visual images of nature (landscapes, geographies) are essential to understanding culture" (p. 227). In the case of the Peace Corps, nature functions as a way of simplifying and conflating cultures. Figure 1 is representative of a typical image found on the Peace Corps' web page. On each of the many pages, the viewer encounters a landscape shot as the banner image. The landscapes vary; however, none of these contain people, rather they emphasize the pastoral nature of foreign lands. This universalizing choice reinforces a safe, pristine view of development work.

Further reinforcement of the differences between East and West ever present in these images is that of exoticizing the *other*. Indigenous dress is one of the most common features of these photographs. Images of ritual costumes or tribal dress are often equated with a pre-modern mentality, and most recruitment images show native peoples in their native dress. Rarely is Western dress displayed, even though it is prevalent in most societies today. Traditional clothing is more often photographed because it reminds us of the exotic. The exotic, to Westerners, shows cultural differences and/ or frames the *other* as spectacle. The photographer is consistently drawn to people in brightly colored, traditional dress, and often engaged in seemingly strange rituals or inexplicable behavior. As a way of reinforcing universalizing principles, the indexical dress is never named nor is the ritual is ever described. All nations served by volunteers are exotic and interesting precisely because they are not the same as the West.

Figure 2 – taken from the Peace Corps web site

Lutz and Collins (1993) state that "indigenous dress, ritual costumes, and tribal fashion are common because they suggest something about the social stability and timelessness of the people depicted" (p. 92). The boys in figure 2 demonstrate a different kind of depiction, one that includes ritual as a social force. Images of ritual have the ability to show an embedded tradition or some kind of sacred world; this ritual can impact the viewer by highlighting the mysterious nature of the other, reinforcing the difference between *us* and *them*. No image does this more profoundly than Figure 2 where tribal costumes include face painting of a warrior tradition. The exotic dress and ritual are wholly unfamiliar to Western culture. The exotic in itself universalizes culture by marking a difference between the norms of Western culture and the spectacle of all that falls outside of this paradigm. Lutz and Collins' argue that the marking of difference is "always highly charged . . . one term is generally dominant and prior, the other secondary and defined antithetically to the first" (p.

276). The contrast implies a sense of hierarchy and an *us* vs. *them* objectification, which ultimately critiques the exotic for its difference, privileging universalism.

Amplifying the exoticization of the non-Western cultures, Peace Corps utilized photographs of animals in contexts that seem unthinkable to the Western viewer. Multiple images of animals show up in Peace Corps' visual rhetoric. Animals not only serve to exoticize culture, they also display innocence in the culture.

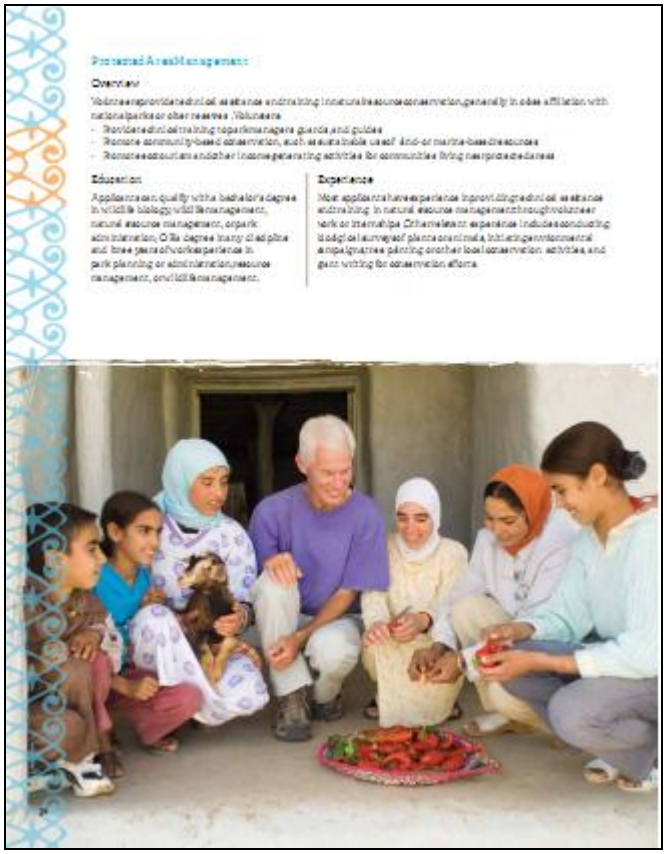

Figure 3 – A page from the 2011 Peace Corps Recruitment Catalog

Figure 3 shows a volunteer surrounded by host country nationals. To the right of the volunteer, a young woman holds a goat on her lap while the group presumably shares a learning experience with the volunteer. At times the organization shows elephants and monkeys in the home or within a close-up camera shot, which may be common in many other parts of the world; therefore, this kind

of image is used to reinforce the difference between the West and the non-West, again through the exotic.

While the exoticizing of non-Western traditions objectifies difference, some Peace Corps images perform a far more damaging role as they communicate a narrative of helplessness. As rhetorics of helplessness dominate the narrative of development, the images articulate a plea to be rescued from the confines of life in an under-developed world. Rhetorics of this nature reinforce the US's mission of aid by framing development in terms of universal values that are to be upheld for all peoples, in all nations. Michael Hunt (1987) argues that

> U.S. foreign policy ideology has also proven disabling by cutting Americans off from an understanding of, not to mention sympathy for, cultures distant from our own. The sense of national superiority central to that ideology has given rise to stereotypes that diminish other people by exaggerating the seemingly negative aspects of their lives and constricting the perceived range of their skills, accomplishments, and emotions. (p. 176)

While the Peace Corps images may not purposefully frame the people of foreign nations as unskilled, incapable, or unwilling, they certainly create a space for the consequences of such a narrative.

Children are the focus of the majority of Peace Corps photographs because they communicate the future of a nation, free from blame. As long as children are the central figures in Peace Corps' visual rhetoric, the foreign nationals being served will continue to be romanticized and idealized. The world always appears safe and welcoming when children are involved. This rhetoric maintains a focus on youth because children are automatically equated with the future and the potential for change. Education is one of the major volunteer assignments, and education is understood to be a way toward development. Figure 4 represents another common image used for

recruitment. A volunteer, typically Caucasian, teaches a group of students. By frequently picturing children, the organization further emphasizes an inherent desire for development. Lutz and Collins (1993) argue that "the child alone or in groups of other children is consonant with the sociological reality in which children are not integrated into the adult world of work or leisure and with the cultural belief that the child is a special kind of person rather than a miniature or even protoadult" (p. 107). Childhood is romanticized ignoring the real work that occurs during service.

Figure 4 – displays children on most web pages

The Peace Corps makes space for a seamless sense of Westernization to occur by purposefully ignoring the context of their photographs. Edward Said's (1979) orientalism and the *us* vs. *them* contrast reduces *them* into an essentialized group who can collectively be labeled *other*. From the perspective of universalism, the ignorance of difference serves to create equality amongst the actors; however, as Said suggests, we are always aware of ourselves in contrast to any other. The Peace Corps continuously reinscribes this notion through image and word and mostly through the unspoken or unseen. The most obvious example of Said's claim put into action is the lack of captions on any Peace Corps publications. The closest indication we find of labeling comes on the organization's website when regions of the world are identified visually and on a map. However, even in this example, regions, such as Asia, Africa, South America are large, diverse areas with rich

cultures and peoples, but this is ignored in deference to the simplicity of universalizing the experience of volunteering and service. This anonymity denies an historical perspective on the events of the developing world and as Lutz and Collins (1993) point out, "their story ceases to be about their own autonomous concerns; individuals become signs in a story the West is telling about its relationship to the non-Western world" (p. 275). Contextualizing a narrative allows for movement toward the particular understanding of the other; the difference between the work of a magazine like *National Geographic* and the Peace Corps is that the magazine's uses the image alongside prose to provide a further contextualized narrative, while the Peace Corps ignores any obligation to humanizing the image.

In many cases, the images that are not displayed are as important as those that are. In the case of the Peace Corps, men are largely absent from photographs, in fact, adults are largely absent. These absences create a necessary space for voluntarism and justify the work of volunteers to the viewer. Universalizing discourses, such as those employed by the Peace Corps, act as a means to assert Western ideological influences over the poorest nations. Michael Hunt (1987) asserts that, "this American position on spheres of influence – denying them to others while carving them out for ourselves – has from the foreign perspective made the United States seem hypocritical and aggressive rather than enlightened and peace-loving" (p. 174). Universalism has been seen as the ideology of domination, potentially creating danger for the volunteers as they develop relationships and a level of trust with the people amongst whom they live and work.

Relying on Particularism

Gone are the days of letter writing, postcards, or private journaling about the experiences of life in a non-native land; in the 21st century, volunteer web sites and weblogs emerged as a significant shift in the primary means of communicating life as a Peace Corps volunteer. Individual

accounts of the volunteer's daily activities, both eventful and mundane, make their way onto the World Wide Web for anyone to view. A repository for Peace Corps volunteer web sites and blogs (http://www.peacecorpsjournals.com) provides access to nearly 10,000 different sites. The accessibility of these images creates a competing discourse to those offered by the Peace Corps. Though the means of communication have changed, the romanticism of particularism remains. Volunteers seem to recognize the individuality of their service, meaning that they are not bound by overarching stereotypes of culture. Because the volunteer experience is individualized and contained within one country and within that country, one community, the volunteer's identification with his or her own experiences manifests itself in the visual images captured through the lens of the volunteer camera. While the Peace Corps' official images uphold the values expressed previously: sanitization of scenery, an exoticizing of the other, and a developed sense of helplessness, the volunteer photographs tell a very different story. The volunteer images embrace *real* scenery. The exoticized other, while still exotic, is contextualized and personalized through the accompanying prose. The host country nationals no longer seem helpless or ignorant as they did within the Peace Corps' official rhetoric. As volunteers begin adopting the customs, dress, and rituals of their foreign neighbors, the effects of particularism permeate the structure of the photographs.

figure 5 – From a volunteer blog: Building a community water station

Volunteer web sites show them hard at work building houses and community water wells, digging latrines, farming, and teaching. One distinct difference between the volunteer photographs and the organizational photographs is that volunteer photographs generally contain captions or stories that serve to frame the picture, making clear the motivation for posting such an image. In the cases of figures 5 and 6, the volunteers wrote that they were working on community projects with partners within their area of service. The volunteer in figure 5 is helping his community build a water station and in figure 6 another volunteer is building a water tank in Panama. These volunteers explain each project in detail, and they post multiple images of themselves hard at work and their community members working alongside them. Contrasting the images found on the organization's web site, the volunteer images include foreign nationals hard at work alongside their American counterparts. This competes with the narrative of universalism where the developing world lacks productive citizens.

Figure 7 – From a volunteer blog: Panama water tank project

Volunteers quite often post pictures of specific members in their community and tell associated stories. Rather than simply displaying images of groups of children or unspecified people in exotic scenarios, the volunteers show their viewers what life actually looks like in their communities. In figure 8, a volunteer shows the disability of a young girl in her village and in the post tells her story in hopes of raising money to help the young girl receive an operation. In figure 9, the community's children study by lantern in order to learn English. And in figure 10, the volunteer displays an image of her neighbor's funeral ceremony. This exemplifies the contrast between the organization's and the volunteer's two different depictions of service. We may see similar images on the two web sites, but on the volunteer web site, the image is made personal and is narrated according to the experience of the volunteer. The volunteer web journals create a connection

between the reader, the volunteer, and his or her community. So, in the case of the funeral, the ceremony seems less exotic when we know it is a volunteer's close friend.

Figure 8 – From a volunteer blog: A compassionate story about a young girl is told

Life in the Peace Corps, according to a majority of volunteer web journals, is challenging. Not only do volunteers work hard to develop their communities, they also work hard washing their clothes, cutting their grass, and fighting off various animals and insects. These images serve to demonstrate to the reader how different the life of the volunteer is from the organization's portrayal on its web site and in its recruitment brochures. This juxtaposes the readers' comfortable life in America, making volunteer service both exotic and challenging.

Figure 9 – From a volunteer blog: Children completing homework by candelight

As evidenced by images taken from volunteer web sites, service may not be as simplistic as imagined in the organization's recruitment rhetoric. Volunteers present their lives and service as complex and challenging. In some ways volunteers utilize images that reinforce the same message as the organization, but those images on volunteer web sites are accompanied by heart-warming stories and complex tales of life abroad. Through the eyes of the volunteer, service is both rewarding and frustrating. Volunteer web pages serve as a source of information for potential volunteers that further reinforce the work of an individual image and the difference it makes when an image is contextualized through a volunteer's written, lived experience. In the past, the Peace Corps' literature was the main means of communicating Peace Corps experiences and expectations. Today potential volunteers can access the over 10,000 blogs to help formulate their impressions of volunteer life and of service. The blogs are easily found through a central database broken down by country of service. However, at this point, the primary means for recruitment come from the

organization's web site, as it is the initial entry point for volunteer applications. Volunteer blogs are often accessed after a potential volunteer is given a country assignment allowing the future volunteer insight into the daily life in that particular country.

Figure 10 – A funeral ceremony caputured on a volunteer blog

Within a particularizing rhetoric, limitations exist. Particularism has the potential to be as dangerous as universalism. Without universalism, we fail to recognize the similarities of others. Volunteers exhibit an acute sensitivity to the particular issues of their service communities while at the same time recognizing the universality of humanity and what it means to embrace other cultures in an effort not to exploit or to change but to understand and increase tolerance.

Conclusions

The consequences of representation, universalism, and particularism are serious. Not only is universalism potentially dangerous for Americans as our world becomes increasingly unstable with the imposing threat of nuclear war, global climate change, and extremist terrorisms, it also threatens the security of all nations. Our understanding of development strategies relies on a respect for diversity and difference while at the same time ensuring the safety, security, and basic human rights

of humanity. Huntington (1996) asks that we remember "What is universalism to the West is imperialism to the rest" (p. 184). The perception of the US to other nations lies at the foundation of our security. As organizations like the Peace Corps continue to force universal principles on other nations, they place the volunteer in a position of danger. It is then the responsibility of the volunteer to secure his or her own space as an important, trustworthy member of the assigned community.

Samuel Huntington (1996) argues that "in a multicivilizational world, the constructive course is to renounce universalism, accept diversity, and seek commonalities" (p. 319). Sargent Shriver attempted to integrate the principles of universalism and particularism in 1961; however, the vision to spread a universal American Dream prevailed. The concept of the American Dream plays a significant role in the work of the Peace Corps throughout its history by deeply connecting liberal developmentalism and universalism. This essay demonstrates that individual volunteers understand Huntington's argument far better than the organization itself.

However, Laclau (1992) asserts that if we reject universalism entirely, we find ourselves in a "political blind alley" (p. 90). While overarching Universalist narratives harm the individuality of developing nations, the particularizing rhetorics of volunteer images fail to encapsulate the common value amongst all people. However, when taken collectively the volunteer blogs and online journals provide particular snapshots of a diverse world full of commonalities. Myria Georgiou (2005) encourages scholars to look beyond the particularization of universalism and the universalization of particularism in an effort to see various cultural perspectives as part of a continuum. Georgiou suggests that thinking about "cultural difference and ideologies of particularism as interwoven in universalistic ideologies can help us understand cultural tensions and conflicts as the inevitable struggles that take place in the process of surpassing exclusive and Orientalist universalisms and exclusive and insular particularisms" (p. 484). The continuum approach to development provides

the space for multi-dimensional perspectives on service and development. Michael H. Hunt (1987) questions our ability to change our existing foreign policy to separate foreign and domestic agendas allowing the promotion of liberty at home and accepting that different principles might work abroad. He asks, “Can Americans behave as true believers at home and agnostics before the world?” (p. 198). Given the volunteer perspective, we might say that individually, in special situations, the answer is yes. However, on a broader organizational level, how can we balance these two perspectives? How can we live the continuum and make it work in our broader theory of development? In the face of development onlookers see the United States in many different ways, some favorable others not. Ultimately, the US government has the responsibility to rearticulate its rhetorical image in a way that ensures our safety, security, and aids in the work of development where all actors are respected and receive benefit from the work.

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