

White Saviorism and American Imperialism: An Analysis of the Peace Corps

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Introduction

- This project focuses on how the narratives of Peace Corps volunteers (PCVs) resist and/or reinforce white saviorism and American imperialism
- Bandyopadhyay (2019) emphasizes the white savior complex as a harmful practice engaged by many volunteers
- Cobbs (1996) calls out the imperialistic past of the Peace Corps
- Amin (2013) and Kallman (2019) reflect on the qualifications of volunteers to do their work

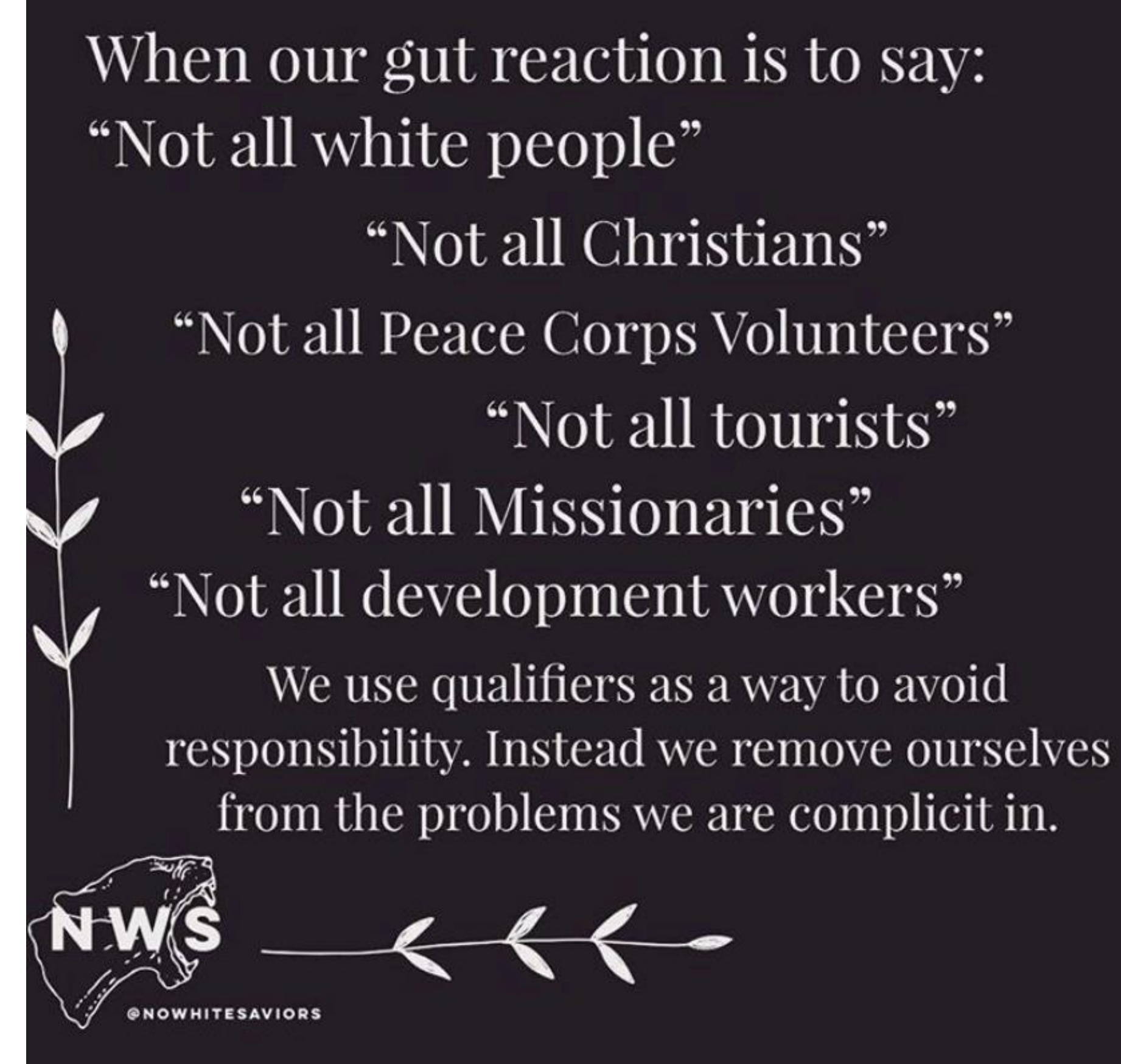
Theoretical Framework & Methods

- Used an intersectional approach to look at how race, gender, class, and nationality privilege are reinforced and challenged in the narratives of PCVs
- Analyzed PCV blogs found using the search terms “Peace Corps blogs”
- Applied content analysis and visual analysis to examine how privilege and power operate within the narratives and images of Peace Corps volunteers

Findings and Discussion

- Many volunteers are recognizing their own responsibilities and holding themselves accountable, while others are not
- Many PCVs engage with the concept of white saviorism. They discuss what it is, how they have witnessed it, and the importance of being aware of its impact (Bandyopadhyay 2019)
- Some PCVs critically engage by analyzing the goals of the Peace Corps in relation to the work that is being done
- Other volunteers post pictures of themselves surrounded by local people (often children) or just pictures of local people, which reinforce messages of white saviorism
- Some volunteers also recognize the history of colonialism and imperialism that host countries have experienced and how this power can impact the relationships between volunteers and their host communities
- PCVs’ recognition of the inherently imperialistic intentions of the Peace Corps coincides with Cobbs’ (1996) research

This image, included in one of my blogs, is from the Instagram account @NoWhiteSaviors



No White Saviors is an advocacy group and campaign that works to decolonize development work and educate people about the harms of white saviorism

Implications

- Many volunteers actively resist white saviorism and imperialism and critically engage with these concepts in their blogs
- These messages have the capacity to change minds and turn volunteer work into work that is sustainable and ethical for host communities
- This project expands on existing literature that addresses how white saviorism and imperialism are crucial to future PCVs

References

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- Kallman, Meghan Elizabeth. 2019. “The ‘Male’ Privilege of White Women, the ‘White’ Privilege of Black Women, and Vulnerability to Violence: An Intersectional Analysis of Peace Corps Workers in Host Countries.” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 21 (4): 566–94.
- No White Saviors (@NoWhiteSaviors), “When being challenged or met with critical feedback, many of us will respond. . .,” Instagram, October 22, 2018, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BpQNZHGnXDD/?igshid=v5bhg9n7h5pv>

Further information

Feel free to email me with any questions or comments at svobodma@mail.gvsu.edu