Power and Privilege: Community Service Learning in Tijuana

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As social scientists engage their own subjectivity, there is greater awareness of their own touristic "gaze," or at least the power relations that are evoked in the researcher-subject interaction. In teaching students involved in community service learning, the challenge is to provide a learning experience that addresses power inequities between student and served. How do we teach students to recognize axes of privilege, be critical of their roles, and be sensitive to the multiple dimensions of power relations among and between server and served? This article proposes to examine how service-learning can be a catalyst for examining the important issue of subjectivity. Drawing from qualitative data of students working in migrant labor camps and community development projects in the context of Tijuana, I discuss how students viewed power differentials and came to consider their relative social class and racialized differences in the context of the Mexican border zone.

Dimensions of Subjectivity: An Introduction

Reciprocity is the key to community service learning; this is what differentiates it from philanthropy and charity. The reciprocity involved, however, is asymmetrical. I remember as a young girl, about age nine, my sister and I were waiting for the distribution of Christmas gifts. We were at a community hall, and the distribution of gifts was part of a philanthropic event. Although I was only nine, I vividly recall two things about the occasion. I remember getting the gift, a Chinese Checker game set. But more vivid was the wait. Waiting to open the gift, waiting while I felt others were watching us. I remember experiencing the slightest feeling of unease, for I knew that most other classmates had this exchange in their homes, not in a public setting, and I knew that I had to appear most grateful, regardless of what the package held. As I remember this event, it pains me to remember that even though I was most grateful, I was the object of their gaze. My reaction was the reward for their charity. And while it did feel nice to get a new gift, I'll never forget that humbling feeling. My mother, a single woman, an immigrant, never openly expressed such feelings; her resourcefulness was always useful in keeping our household abreast economically. But I find it funny to imagine, now, how this type of interaction would unfold in the present, with my students as the protagonists involved in a similar exchange. Would they ever be able to understand those feelings of a little girl's angst? And, perhaps more importantly, is such an understanding an important part of their interaction?

To me, this memory marks a tension of service-learning. How can we teach students to be cognizant of, and sensitive to, what Mary Louise Pratt (1992) calls, "contact zones": the disparate social spaces where authority and hierarchy encounter and engage with the Other? This can be a particular challenge when students are not diverse in their social class and ethnic backgrounds, as is the case at my campus where the student body is primarily middle- and upper- class, and predominantly White. For me, a central challenge in making community service learning a valuable pedagogical tool is figuring out how to encourage students to think about and critically reflect upon their own social locations; that is, be cognizant of how their "gazes" might be imbued with power. Ethnic Studies scholar Gail Perez (2001) eloquently addresses the difficulties of critical pedagogy: "Pedagogical innovations like experiential learning must be scrutinized; they are often so narrowly defined that their transformative potential is negated (i.e., the power relations within them are mystified)" (p. 87). Below I argue that while community service learning is ideally designed to be rooted in mutuality and reciprocity between servers and served, issues of power and privilege can create an asymmetrical relationship between both. A sustained service-learning interaction, fused with close analysis to server subjectivity, is central to addressing such inequities.

Many of the social sciences and humanities are undergoing a process of decolonization, raising to the surface power issues and incorporating historically-marginalized voices. How this process translates into the classroom, however, is a challenge. Anthropologists in particular have not been as

engaged with community service learning as a pedagogical tool, despite the many similarities in method (particularly field research) and approach (at local levels). The reluctance to incorporate community service learning into the classroom may stem from a lag in how theory is transformed into praxis. While many educators have begun to decolonize our discipline, perhaps some are reluctant to send out students without examining the nuances of how such sensitivity to relations of power unfolds. This sensitivity is very difficult to teach because American society is trained more to be consumers, tourists, and myopic in terms of constructing social realities. For a student who has never before been a recipient of some kind of service, for example, the task of reflexivity is one that cannot simply be explained; it must be lived. It is as challenging to teach students to be reflexive about the service-learning encounter as it is to make them aware of their various axes of privilege.

This task of locating and deconstructing power relations is one that creates tremendous resentment, and sometimes even hostility, in students. In a compelling article, Ann Green (2001) cautions of the tendency to gloss over differential power relations when students do not "feel good." The topic of race can make a student uncomfortable, she argues, and must be dissected, particularly when there is a racialized power imbalance in the community service learning interaction:

> Well-intentioned white people, both students and faculty, must learn racial awareness, and middle class people of all races must think about how class affects the service situation. It is absolutely important to talk about the intersections of race, class, and service in order to prevent service-learning from replicating the power imbalances and economic injustices that create the need for service-learning in the first place. (p.18)

While anthropologists may be especially sensitive to these types of social relations, it is only recently that we have begun to examine ourselves critically.

The value of community service learning is it can potentially offer an incisive starting point to discuss these power differentials. The community service learning context provides a 'contact zone,' allowing for an interactive opportunity in which understandings and practices can be turned on their heads, improvised, examined and reexamined. Metaphoric borders of identity can be explored, even crossed. Recognition of the power differentials can occur at multiple levels, and differently for servers and served at various moments and across contexts (spatially and temporally). Though little research has examined which conditions elicit particular responses among students (some have argued that the process is a linear one, or a "continuum" of learning), I argue that 'border crossings' in the contact zones tend to be more haphazard, not necessarily producing systematic and similar responses among students, but varied and diverging experiences.

The key to navigating this "messiness" of experiences is to provide, inasmuch as possible, a *sustained experience* in which servers and served have an immersion experience among each other. Just as anthropologists emphasize devoting long amounts of time to their field sites, developing rapport with a key informant in particular, service-learning students should have the chance to develop in-depth rapport with a single community member and carry this relationship through the duration of the academic period. Limited visits to the community site or a single visit during the academic period may be counter-productive to the learning aspect of service work. A sustained experience, allowing the server to begin to hear and begin to see differently, can be tremendously empowering at both ends. Potentially, such a sustained interaction can overcome an essentialization or reification of the Other. By highlighting not stasis but the dynamic aspects of social relations, and by having the opportunity to explore the particularities—the detailed histories of individuals—rather than producing generalizations, community service learning can allow for exploring the varied positions of power that members of the served community inhabit. This can be valuable in debunking stereotypes and challenging students' tendency to construct the Other as a monolith. It can begin to provide students, in spite of a homogenous experience on campus, with new tools for examining and understanding their diverse social worlds.

Rethinking Subjectivity

In the late 1980s and 1990s anthropology as a discipline underwent major changes. Particularly with the injection of cultural studies and feminist theoretical frameworks, anthropologists began to critique our historical links to colonialism and examine how cultural ethnographies sometimes resulted in reified representations of the Other. Anthropologists started to get serious about their subjectivity. We started to debunk the idea that fieldwork was "objective" and began to incorporate our biases into the craft of research. This opened up many new avenues for anthropologists, who converged with philosophers, semioticians, and literary analysts to begin deconstructing the objectivity/subjectivity polemic. This allowed anthropologists to insert themselves in between the space of

the subject of their study and the product of their study (the ethnography). What was most valuable about this new paradigm was that anthropological inquiry had a self-reflexive element, and we began to discern the voices and accents of the researchers themselves. Throughout this revision to the craft of ethnography, an examination of power relations ensued. In particular, anthropologists began to examine sites of power, of resistance, of acquiescence; in short, understanding agency became a central organizing principle of our discipline (see Ahearn, 2001; Ortner, 1984; 2001).

In a sense, there is a parallel between how the objectivity/subjectivity framework has been deconstructed and how community service learning and the practice of philanthropy have been related. Philanthropy occurs in the absence of reflexivity, without conscientiousness toward the differential relations of power embedded in the interaction, and as a hegemonic relationship in which the "receiving" group has been "selected" as "needy" by a more powerful group. In community service learning, the receiving group usually has some say in how they are accessed, in the type of services they receive, and in forming and developing the relationship. Students are required to be reflexive about the interaction, and in this sense while the relation of power is still present, students can process the interaction and critically theorize it in light of these themes. Subjectivity is at the center, or at least this is the goal.

Modes of Power and Community Service Learning

While we may attempt to teach sensitivity to the varied dimensions of power relations, and theorize the importance of reflexivity, how do students ultimately perceive the service-learning encounter? How differently do students experience service-learning, compared to philanthropy or charity? Both charity and philanthropy, Vron Ware (1992) argues, are situated in a history of power and domination, serving to regulate class difference and ensure class privilege (elaborated by Mindry, 1999, p. 186). Does service-learning also regulate such differences? Are the relations of power involved in community service learning masked under the guise of "mutuality"?

Mindry (1999) and Malkki (1995) have theorized the nature of the relationship between giver and receiver of aid in terms of "philanthropic modes of power" (Malkki, p. 296). They describe how charity and other forms of service are laden within a field of power relations, and how this type of service work operates without any conscientious acknowledgment of how power operates, about who holds the power, and how the service recipients are made to feel as a result of the service-interaction. Although their research is not in the context of community service learning (it is on the roles of NGOs), the implications of their concerns are relevant here. In describing the relationship between those who serve and are served, Mindry clarifies the essence of philanthropic power:

> The language of privilege and responsibility to others is deeply imbued with a sense of hierarchy and superiority. Philanthropic work reinscribes the privileged status of those engaged in such work by emphasizing their superior position in relation to those who become the object of their caring. (p. 188)

Mindry argues that philanthropy does not empower, but rather *legitimizes* the social hierarchy:

> It reinscribes the social order or, at best, seeks to change things in ways that do not substantially threaten the existing order, and in fact make the dominant order seem morally worthy and a standard to be emulated. Philanthropy is a liberal project that is profoundly configured by "enlightenment" and modernist ideals of progress, and "betterment." (p. 188)

Community service learning is also a liberal project, yet it differs ideologically from philanthropy in that its goal is to promote social change (Morton, 1995; Rhoads, 1997). Nonetheless, the encounters are still largely marked by class differences, and many writers lucidly point out that some students "just don't get it," and are precluded because of their own "developmental realities" (Green, 2001; Jones, 2002; Rosenberger, 2000). As Jones asserts, "...there is some likelihood of service-learning experiences actually reinforcing the negative stereotypes and assumptions that students bring with them to the class environment" (p.10). To what extent, contrary to its goals, does community service learning reinscribe power relations?

Cynthia Rosenberger (2000) fluently addresses this issue:

> Recalling Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1997) I began to question whether service learning is yet another way that those who have power and privilege, even if only by education, name the problems and the solutions for the less privileged. I became concerned that service learning easily carries connotations of "doing good," of the "haves" giving to the "have-nots," of "we" serving "them"—perspectives that reproduce positions of power. For me, the fundamental question became: To what extent does service learning, although intended to meet community needs

> and promote active citizenship, sustain the hegemony of the elite and perpetuate the status quo of privilege and oppression created by the economic and educational opportunities of class, race, and gender? (p. 24)

Because community service learning is a tool that brings these issues to the forefront, it can be utilized to deliberately think and theorize about such tensions. Being more self-conscious can begin to help name these power differentials, and in the process of naming them, can begin to teach critical approaches to subjectivity. We can then begin to explore where the axes of potential resistance to hierarchical relationships exist. How can contestation, or modes of resistance, be collaboratively created? Within the social sciences, some have begun to employ "participatory action" research strategies, the core of which shares many similarities with the ideal outcomes of community service learning: collaboration in project design, policy-relevance, sharing in the data collection and analysis procedures, disseminating project outcomes at local levels, de-centering the hierarchical researcher-subject relation. There is clearly a link between participatory action research and the aims of community service learning.

As a newcomer to community service learning, I had some hesitation (based on the above theoretical inclinations) about incorporating experiential learning into the classroom. Below I detail my experience of community service learning in a course titled, "Sociology of the Border" (referring to the U.S.-Mexico borderlands).[1]

Context: Exploring Subjectivity in the Borderland

Located in the "borderlands" of the U.S.-Mexico region, students attending the University of San Diego are exposed to Mexican migrants on a daily basis. Mexican workers tend the campus gardens, serve students food in the dining halls, empty campus trashcans, and mop academic halls. While driving north within San Diego County and further beyond, Mexican workers hunched over at the waist can be observed in the fields picking berries or tomatoes for our nation's markets. At local restaurants and fast food eateries they work as busboys or in the kitchen. They service many residential communities as gardeners, nannies, and housekeepers. Until recently, aboard the local trolleys, it was not uncommon to witness those who "appear to be 'illegal'" stopped by U.S. Border Patrol and asked for identification. Signs on local freeways alert drivers that migrants may be running across the freeway to evade border patrol. Cars line up to pass the border checkpoints, located 60 miles north of the border. In short, the students on our campus are exposed on a daily basis to what it means to inhabit a "borderland" space. Mexican immigrants form a tremendous part of everyday lives, yet many students have never personally met an "undocumented immigrant." Many students only experience their labor indirectly and rarely have they had the opportunity to interact one-on-one, know of their plight, other than through propaganda such as "SOS" (Save our State, California Proposition 187 that sought to make it illegal for immigrants to utilize public health services and access to public education). A hostile climate exists in San Diego toward Mexican immigrants. Last year in Penasquitos (a suburb of San Diego), three migrants were beaten by White boys; other migrants have been targets of stoning and even shootings.

My class, "The U.S. Mexico Border/Borderlands" sought to teach students about Mexicans' economic and social contributions. The goals of the course were to: understand the evolution of the borderlands and its international-political climate; move beyond an individual-level approach to understanding the phenomenon of migration and examine its historical-structural dimensions; deconstruct "Operation Gatekeeper" (the militarized wall that has been erected between the United States and Mexico); and critically examine the border patrol's actions. More importantly, I wanted students to experience the border culture that is sometimes isolated beyond the university ivory tower. I wanted them to learn that immigrants are not criminals, as the media sometimes portrays them. I wanted them to experience their humanity.

Preparing students for community service learning among Mexican migrants began with a tour of the Tijuana region. We had just learned about Tijuana's "Black Legend," the economic history behind how Tijuana became a notorious touristic destination (Ruiz, 2000), and I wanted to take my students to the sites they would be visiting later for their community service learning assignments. Some of my students had never before been to Tijuana, some had only visited the "party zone" on *Avenida Revolucion*, a couple of my students were born in Tijuana, and about half of my students grew up in the "borderlands" as Chicanas and Chicanos, considered themselves "borderlanders" and claimed to be somewhat more comfortable in the surreal Tijuana space than others. Accompanying us were three experts: the Director of Community Service Learning on our campus, the Assistant Director of the Trans-Border Institute from our campus, and a visiting professor from Texas, who was serving as President of the Association for

Borderland Studies. While the goal was to offer students a preview of the sites, overwhelmingly I felt, as did some students, that we were very much like tourists, elite tourists for that matter, as we sat from high in our chairs on the bus and drove around the city. And so we began our experience of the U.S. Mexico border zone, theorizing "the tourist gaze"(Urry, 1990) and the power relations that have constructed our country's contentious history with our southern neighbor.

Over the course of the semester we read extensively and relied on guest speakers to discuss issues not prominent in the media. One speaker recounted the numerous human rights violations against migrants. Another discussed the negative portrayal of immigrants in the media (as "invaders" in our society). We also watched a video produced by the Border Patrol showing the latest technological advances on how the border is policed to capture those who enter illegally. (We had a tour scheduled with the Border Patrol, but they cancelled it due to "Homeland Security"). These diverse pedagogical approaches sought to expose students to a plurality of perspectives about migration and policing the border. The film, *Natives*, taught students about how local (White) San Diegans construct themselves as "native" to this region, discursively re-inscribing Mexican migrants as distinct, foreign and "other," despite their long history in the United States (see also Chavez, 2001).

There were two service-learning components to the class: a group project in which all participated in an event ("Day of the Child") to benefit children of one community in Tijuana; the other, an ongoing project, was scheduled through the Community Service Learning office on campus. Students could choose between visiting three different placements. 1) *Casa del Migrante*, a sort of half-way house for migrants waiting to cross into the United States, where cultural information, temporary lodging, food, clothing, and medical assistance is offered. Students could share a meal with migrants, engage in conversations, assist in distributing food supplies, and learn first-hand knowledge from migrants who had been apprehended attempting to cross the border and planned to do so again. 2) *La Morita*, a community/educational center and clinic that meets medical and educational needs of those who have moved from elsewhere in Mexico to Tijuana, many of whom are on the migratory path to the U.S., or have family members who are. Here students could engage in a range of activities, from brainstorming about possible community projects to actually constructing physical edifices, alongside Mexican workers. 3) *Migrant Outreach*, a service that provides supplies, food, and religious services to migrants already in the United States. Students traveled to the migrant camps and spent a half-day on Sundays talking with the migrants, teaching them or practicing English language skills, learning or practicing Spanish skills, and providing some items to which migrants might not have access (such as blankets and clothing).

It is important to note that in these contexts, the migrants are not simply passive recipients (even though they are colloquially termed, "*pollos*" or "chickens," because they are subjected to the "*coyotes*," the human smugglers, who can assist or thwart their efforts to cross). Rather, migrants know of, and clearly articulate, the liminal status they inhabit in the United States. These community service learning sites are places where they can safely express their needs and fears. Their "undocumented" status in the United States, however, belies a more complicated position. As I detail below, from the Mexican perspective, migration is viewed as a heroic endeavor (this is especially because remittances from migrants contribute significantly to the Mexican GNP). Thus migrants know they are fulfilling important national and local needs within Mexico, and yet this role is juxtaposed with the discrimination they encounter within the United States. We see, then, that migrants simultaneously occupy varied positions of power and powerlessness.

In designing this class I faced two main challenges. First, I was teaching in a highly-charged political context: the local San Diego population has approved numerous political propositions to have immigrants apprehended, bar them from using public services, and blockade their entrance into the country (Operation Light Up the Border). This challenge manifested itself subtly. For example, one student told me a story of her hometown, Temecula, and her everyday encounters with migrants evading border patrol. Outside of class she told me that one day, as she rode her bike, a migrant's car, involved in a chase with the Border Patrol, crashed into her. She told me that since then she harbored a deep resentment against all migrants, for their recklessness. She painfully recounted this narrative, and I interpreted her to say that even though she could understand the structural/historical context of migrants, this particular individual event tainted her understanding. I wondered about my other students' experiences and how their individual ideas, and perhaps stereotypes, about migrants would play out in my classroom.

A second challenge I was concerned about in designing this course was a sense of resistance that I had encountered in previous courses when teaching about issues of privilege. Most sensitive was

the topic of "Whiteness," which I discussed as the silent and normative dimension of racial relations against which all other races are constructed (see Frankenberg, 1997; Giroux, 1997; Lipsitz, 1998; Rasmussen, Nexica, Klinenberg, & Wray, 2001). How could I make service-learning relevant to these students when, at a theoretical level, within the classroom many of them seemed indifferent, even irritated that I teach from the prism of difference? This points to the partial futility in trying to teach didactically about cultural difference alone.[2] If I made community service learning a requirement, how would I manage the various reactions and create a useful pedagogical exercise? How, most importantly, would I be able to have students, through their service, recognize their own subjectivity, reflect on their own relative power, and make some connections to their own identities?

Methodology

The data presented below are based on an availability sample of 30 students from one class: 25 females and 5 males; 16 Chicanos/Latinos (I include in this group three Mexican bi-nationals who resided in Mexico and commuted to San Diego), 12 white students, and 2 African American students. (Note that the classroom demographics were not representative of the campus.) My sample size of men was too small to account for variation by gender. With regard to national origin, it was glaringly evident that there were marked differences of social class. (For example, one student's bodyguard followed our class around the streets of Tijuana in a Mercedes Benz as we visited the service-learning sites.) Because many undocumented immigrants are from the southern states of Mexico, which have higher indigenous populations, the differences between the Chicanos/Latinos in the class and the migrants were also marked by phenotype and Spanish accents.

I incorporated multiple methods of processing student experiences with migrants. I offered discussions of power relations throughout the class and told students they could incorporate these dimensions into their written ideas. (I also told students I was considering incorporating their ideas and comments into a paper, and asked them to explicitly grant or deny me permission to anonymously include portions of their ideas.) I also required written reflections, with latitude to use prose, poetry, essays, or journal entries.

The analysis is inductive (it begins with data rather than theory) and it engages "exploratory" questions (not seeking explanations, rather, searching for the relevant questions in terms of power, privilege, and community service learning). My aim was not to make generalizable conclusions, but rather to begin to determine the departure points from which to theorize community service learning and issues of inequality.

The analysis presented below is drawn from transcriptions of oral discussions, debriefing sessions, and categorization of 45 pieces of textual products that I was granted permission to include in this article. Utilizing content analysis (Weber, 1990) to review them, I created three categories based on use of language, content of narratives presented, and depth of reflection. Theme one, "Constructing Self and Other," included text that suggested either a judgmental stance toward migrants, or a monolithic treatment of difference. Theme two, "Foreignness" included narratives that suggested student awkwardness among migrants. Narratives raising issues such as, "I felt like the minority" or "They were judging me," were included in this category. The third theme, "Examining Subjectivities," included texts discussing privilege or theorizing about one's own identity relationally. The classification process was subjective and I do not attempt to make generalizaable conclusions based on what is presented here. The effort should be read only as a preliminary exploration of student responses to raise questions, not as an attempt to draw conclusions.

An Exploration of Identities: Data Analysis

Before launching into the findings within the three theme categories, it is important to note that the themes are imperfect - some students' analysis reflected overlapping categories or documented change in perceptions over time. In these few cases, a multiplicity of sentiments were expressed, illustrating how student experiences in their service-learning can shift. In the example below, a student's poem illustrates her varied reactions. Her poem is a useful conversational tool to begin discussing issues of power and reflexivity.

> You are sent as a hero
> he prays to be saved
> you wish your task were over
> he dreams, like you, he had it made
>
> he feels like an example
> you feel like an observer
> he tells you of his struggle
> you tell him you're the intruder
>
> you share your sadness for him
> he shares he doesn't want your pity
> you want to take back those words
> he wants to go back to your city
>
> he gives you strength and hope

you feel your heart bleed
he is the one who saved you
you were the one in need

you complete your duty
he survives his day
you go back to your reality
he can't from his life stray

In this poem the student describes herself as a "hero," "observer," and "intruder," illustrating a tension between multiple roles she experienced. She recognizes that the migrant reached her (he gave her "strength and hope"), and alludes to a sense of reciprocity. At the end of the poem, she returns home. In a subtle way she concludes her poem with the reality that after this encounter she returns to her literal home, her safe refuge, which of course the migrant does not have. I appreciate this poem for its raw honesty, for artistically attempting to multidimensionally convey what the student has experienced.

Throughout the course my challenge was to let my students stand on new ground, both literal and metaphoric, and then aid them in getting used to how the ground shifts as they reflect on their own subjectivity. During in-class reflections, Chicanas dealt openly with identity differences—describing, for example, how they shared common tastes and sometimes language with the Mexicans in Tijuana—yet experienced them as a different social group (they crossed a "social border" (Hayes & Cuban, 1997).[3] The social class differences between them were a topic of conversation. We discussed how it is that once migrants have adjusted to life in the United States, it becomes very difficult to return to Mexico as the same individual. One student had parents who had worked as migrants in the fields as day laborers. She shared her personal experience of how her parents had a difficult time leaving everything behind in Mexico to seek a better life in the United States. Her service was at Migrant Outreach, where they teach basic English and serve food. She wrote,

> At first I found this task very difficult and depressing. How is it that I can just walk off, and not let it bother me that I am going home to have a roof over my head and a warm meal whenever I want to cook? As I continued to attend, I felt more frustrated because I wanted to make a difference. The way I do this is through communicating with the migrants. I learned that sometimes they just need someone to listen to them, to their stories, their troubles. Sometimes these men are starving for attention and need someone to let out their frustrations, anger, and loneliness. They just need someone to listen, not judge them, and just try to understand.

It occurred to me that the human contact these migrants had with students, most of whom were women, fulfilled a valuable need. In the broader context of San Diego County, these men are often targets of animosity and degradation. One migrant, for example, complained that he felt discriminated against when he went into the supermarket, because his "clothes were filthy" and he "did not smell like perfume." Meeting with the female students provided a unique social opportunity. Most migrants who live in migrant camps are young men and their interactions with other young women are limited.

The migrants inhabit a liminal social position. In the United States, they are social outcasts. Yet this position belies the "mystique of migration" and the lauded *machismo* that surrounds the migration process from a Mexican perspective. The President of Mexico, Vincente Fox, for example, recently declared Mexican migrants to the United States as national heroes. In Mexico there is ample folklore and a cultural aura (particularly conveyed through popular music) that exalts the migratory process. Migrants to the United States are viewed as "risk-takers." Young men, in particular, who migrate are lauded for their heroism, fearlessness, and bravado. They embody the sense of Mexican masculinity in their unabashed quest to earn money and improve their social status by traveling the sometimes perilous route across the border.

I realized that even though my students might not be interested in dating the migrants, the migrants probably appreciate young attractive women spending their Sunday afternoons chatting with and listening to them.[4] It is possible, even, that my students could be satisfying an intimate psychological need. The only contact many of these migrants have with single women is with prostitutes that visit the migrant camps (personal communication with Migrant Outreach Director, 2003). I chose not to directly theorize this dimension with my students, because I did not want to confound their experience with such speculation. It is clear, however, that multiple layers of power relations complicate service-learning interactions. We also see that dimensions of gender and sexuality can be intimately embedded within the social relations of community service learning.

Below I give examples of the three themes I found among my student's written work. Through the service-learning opportunities, some students, in the process of discussing their own relative identities, discursively reified the migrants, inadvertently constructing them as objects of their gazes (theme one). Others described a feeling of "foreign-ness" (a sense of displacement or momentary loss of identity), expressed as feelings of being the

"other" or "like a minority" (theme two). Yet others considered their relative power, openly theorized differences, and attempted to critically examine dimensions of privilege (theme three).

Theme One: Constructing Self and Other

One student wrote, "I felt like I was back at home in East Los Angeles with so many people of color; they even sold jalapenos at McDonald's." She wrote that she felt she could relate to the migrants because her mother had crossed illegally when she was 19 years old, but that "my family is now established in the US and they live comfortably, even though only 10 years ago her mother would become fearful at the sight of the border patrol's green van." But the student also said she felt like a tourist, as if people were staring at her because she was with the group of college students.

> As we were walking we saw a stand with meat, and the people were just fanning the flies away with a piece of paper. Right away I heard some students saying, "That's not healthy," and "I don't believe that," and "that is gross." Even I was thinking these things, because I go to the supermarket where the meat is packed up nicely, but for them [the Mexicans], all they have is this marketplace.

Here we see a moralizing discourse, the student establishes herself as different than the Mexicans on the basis of hygiene, a powerful mechanism for indicating social differentiation. In the process, this student has discursively defined her identity, establishing herself as both similar to, and yet socially distinct from, those she is serving.

The second example illustrates a student romanticization of the migrant with whom she interacts:

> I went outside and began talking to one of the migrants who was waiting to go inside. I think I asked him if I could take a picture of him and he was asking me about my photography class and we got to talking a little. While I was taking some pictures of him there were three men sitting on the sidewalk a bit further back. They all made sure that they had their heads turned or somehow did not have their faces in the picture. When I was looking at the pictures later I was thinking about how noble he looked. He was a *campesino* (peasant) from Guerrero and had a job waiting in Pennsylvania picking strawberries. He was going so that he could make money to send home so that his children could continue their schooling. He was really proud that he had come all this way and was trying to go to work for his family. Because he viewed his journey in this manner I feel that is why he was so confident, sincere, and noble in the pictures (as well as in his character in general.) He did not feel like a criminal, like he was from an inferior society, running away from difficulties, or anything else along these lines. What he was doing was something respectful, something to be proud of, and nothing to be ashamed of; he was going somewhere to work hard so that he could better provide for his family's needs. I really hope it works out for him on one hand and that he is able to end up where he wants, but I also hope that he does not end up getting his visa and stays in Guerrero with his family. I feel this way because of the hardship that he is going to face if he tries to come to the US again. It makes me so sad and angry that he will be treated in such a manner that is so wrong once he is in the US.

Here we witness an interesting dimension to the interpersonal dynamic between the student and migrant. She describes him as a "*campesino* from Guerrero" and a "strawberry worker," and elaborates his identity in terms of his familial role (father and provider). She finds it important to note he does not seem "criminal-like" nor "inferior," nor an escapee from social ails (here we see some of her preconceptions of migrants). Together with the other qualitative indicators, her depiction of him as "proud," "sincere," and "noble" summarizes him as the quintessential "noble savage." This is one of the tensions in anthropology: how can we describe our subjects and not essentialize or reify them? How can we convey these dimensions of subtlety to undergraduates in just one course?

Theme Two: Feelings of "Foreign-ness"

Some students defined their experiences in terms of the awkwardness they felt, stating they felt like the "Other." One student expressed feelings of momentary social isolation:

> When we were all sitting together and we were trying to teach them English I realized how hard it was for both of us to be there. For me as an American citizen, I felt like a spoiled brat and I felt like a complete outsider. I was the minority. I was the rich USD student and they were the poor migrants, lucky enough to have survived the trip across the border. It made me think of all that I have, how lucky I am to live here with all the opportunities that I have. But it made me sad to think that just because these men live on the other side of a line, they could not have the same opportunities. It was very awkward; at the same time it was a great experience. It really helped the information that we have learned come alive. I actually saw the altar that is in the book *Shadowed Lives*. I heard the stories of the men and where they were coming from and whom they had left behind. It was truly touching.

This reflection comes from a White student who early in the class established herself as "very patriotic" and somewhat uncomfortable with the migrant-centered perspective from which I taught the class. I empathize with her sense of self-described "awkwardness" in the migrant camp context. The sense she experienced is similar to the one most ethnographers experience in a new context. This feeling of being a "stranger," in a sense glimpsing what it may feel like to be the Other, is a useful one. Inhabiting this space of discomfort, I would argue, is a critical component to understand the migrants' plight. It is truly a painful space to occupy, for it is precisely at a moment when a student is not in her safe, secure space, that she can begin to feel what it is like to cross a border (see also Skilton-Sylvester & Erwin, 2000).

Theme Three: Examining Subjectivities

While some students found the literal and metaphoric border crossings to be somewhat unsettling, because they had never experienced a marked sense of Otherness, other students delved into the experience, using it as a basis for self-examination. One student, for example, a White male, achieved remarkable analytical depth in his narrative. He theorizes his own identity in light of his meeting with the migrant:

> When I take this into Tijuana and sit down to dinner with a migrant who will be crossing the border illegally in a matter of days, I am very aware of my own circumstances. Here I am, a 22 year-old man who has everything the 26 year-old man in front of me wants. The difference between us is a matter of appearances and location of birth. Those two things have determined in many ways what the rest of our lives have been like, and will continue to be. As we talk about ex-girlfriends and his kids, and eventually the act of crossing the border, I continue to be haunted by my privilege and power. I noticed that he would seldom look me in the eye, that he was more than willing to speak English instead of Spanish. I felt a sense of power and belonging even though I was in his country. I actually felt that I had a right to be there because of my material wealth, and of course, my Whiteness, even as we talked about his fight against a country that believes he does not have the right to come in; my country, the U.S. ... The man I ate dinner with may be in the US working illegally at his old construction job, or he may have been caught crossing and sent back to Tijuana. Wherever he is, I know that because I am a citizen of the US, and he a citizen of Mexico, I will always have opportunities that he doesn't. This will always create an environment where I have more power if I so choose, because I do not need him or his country, but he would risk his life to enter mine. It is thus my responsibility to be aware of the power I bring to the relationship, and do what I can to acknowledge we are still equals.

By acknowledging his difference and naming his own dimension of privilege (his Whiteness and social class position), he conveys sensibility to axes of power, rare to find in an undergraduate student.

Another student shared the following story:

> Serving meals at *Casa Migrante*, I made eye contact and exchanged "*Buenos Dias*" with the people in line. I found it odd at first that not everyone thanked us, or said anything when they received their meal. Some scowled and were quick to take their food. I thought about this for a while and then tried to put myself in their place, waiting in line for hours for their small lunch. I realized that this was as much their food as it was mine; I was just the one behind the counter on the serving side rather than in line on the receiving side. Why should they have to thank me? I almost feel guilty now thinking that they should have.

Sometimes the service interaction does not produce "good feelings" as in the above example. The student had spent her Saturday afternoon waiting to serve the migrants and she felt they were ungrateful for their food. The awkwardness of the encounter, however, enabled her to glimpse migrants' perceptions of the interaction. Through this exchange we see that the student reflected on her role, feeling somewhat powerless, guilty, and embarrassed that the exchange did not produce the anticipated effect. She began to understand how humbling it might be to be a migrant. Perhaps she was also made aware of how humiliating it can be to experience the waiting: waiting to receive, imagining what it feels like to be the object of a more powerful gaze.

Discussion: Constructing and Deconstructing Borders

As a teacher and scholar of border studies, I construct how my students think about and relate to Mexico. Am I also complicitous in constructing the border? Does service-learning reinscribe the border, or help break it down?

The physical border, as a material space between the United States and Mexico, exists. Its shape is a militarized wall, manned with the latest technology and it is made real by the migrants who are determined to cross. They risk their lives crossing where the border is most porous. Yet, the U.S.-Mexico border is also a social construction. Peter Andreas (2000), in *Border Games: Policing the U.S.-Mexico*

Divide, argues that the militarized border zone (Dunn, 1996) is a political façade—one that serves the intentions of politicians who have a vested interest in maintaining an image of a peaceful and orderly border. While thousands of migrants are apprehended every month, the employers of the migrants who create the demand for illegal labor are ignored. They are not monitored or "raided" by the Border Patrol, as they once were. The spotlight is on the permeation of the physical border itself. Institutions such as agribusiness, who perpetuate the need for migrant labor, are not the targets of political intervention.

In my class students learn that the border is actually very porous; though the United States may construct a reinforced wall, migrants continue to cross. This is not only in response to the demand for their labor, but also due to a long history in which bi-national social networks have been formed. Many Mexican families live a "transnational" existence. Crossing the border is also part of Mexico's national identity.

In speaking and interacting with migrants, students recognize the human face of migration and begin to understand how laws and policies affect real peoples' lives. For example, now that migrants cross the border through Arizona and California deserts, a deplorable number of migrants die of dehydration. Students encountered migrants who cross the borderlands by foot, gallon-size bottles of water in hand. In Tijuana, students witnessed the wooden crosses nailed upon the Mexican side of the barrier, a physical reminder of, and memorial to, the thousands of migrants who have died attempting to cross.

In thinking about my complicity in constructing the border, I am aware that the community service learning experience may reinforce negative stereotypes of migrants. Many living in the migrant camps on the undeveloped hills of San Diego, for example, have no running water or basic amenities. In exposing the "periphery" that the migrants occupy, however, I find that at least I have begun to sow the seeds of conscientiousness within my students. I see my own role as one that involves developing a vigilance of the injustices toward migrants. Even though I have been accused of "bias" for not presenting the perspectives of so-called "nativist" (anti-immigrant) groups, I accept the label. It is my only strategy to resist reinscribing the border as it has been constructed.

Conclusion

A distinguished law professor asked me recently about the legality of having students interact with "illegal" migrants; what problems might this cause? To me, migrant humanity supercedes the issue of legality. Such a biased predisposition is perhaps at odds with my discipline's history of positivism and attempted "objectivity." Nonetheless, I can either be constrained by this realization or embrace it. Most practitioners of critical, participatory action research acknowledge that such approaches are only slowly approximating the mainstream. Meanwhile, I am honest about my convictions, and allow my students to ponder these issues as well. There is also a fine line in terms of how this position is conveyed to students. On the one hand, I want to caution them about self-righteous illusions about the larger value of their contributions. At the very least, I want to restrain the tendency to view migrants with pity, as victims, and without agency. On the other, I am hopeful that they at least will begin to imagine collaborative strategies of resistance. The tenets of participatory action research are relevant here. As Jim Thomas (1993) suggests,

> Conventional ethnographers study culture for the purpose of describing it; critical ethnographers do so to change it. Conventional ethnographers recognize the impossibility, even undesirability, of research free of normative and other biases, but believe that these biases are to be repressed. Critical ethnographers instead celebrate their normative and political position as a means of invoking social consciousness and societal change. (cited in Calderón, 2004, p. 90)

Though we cannot predict whether community service learning will perpetuate power differences, we can take steps to make students aware of this danger. A realization of power differentials is clearly an important step in beginning to dismantle the hierarchy of social relations between server and served. The trajectory begins with faculty members who, as role models, highlight their collaborative efforts with local communities. In the classroom, faculty must carry over this "collaborativist perspective" to their own students. This means acknowledging our own limitations and biases and speaking openly about issues of Whiteness and other dimensions of privilege. Ira Shor (1996) argues, "power-sharing [in the classroom] repositions students from being cultural exiles to becoming cultural constituents, from being unconsulted curriculum receivers to becoming collaborative curriculum-makers" (p. 200, cited in Ochoa & Ochoa, 2004). The writing and sharing of personal narratives can be one departure point to examine such dimensions of subjectivity. Storytelling, or "counter-stories" (stories that center dimensions of privilege) are tools that can be used by students to

"unpack" their experiences with service-learning. Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso (2002) highlight the transformative potential of stories.

> We believe counter-stories serve at least four functions as follows: (a) They can build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice, (b) they can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society's center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems, (c) they can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position, and (d) they can teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone. (p. 36)

I have argued for a *sustained* service-learning interaction, one that differs from "drop in" or single-episode encounters with the community. Many students feel inadequate, uncomfortable, or out of place in the community service learning context. They need a sustained experience, with conscientious reflection, to be able to move beyond the "tourist gaze," to embrace collectivist efforts, and begin to have a lived experience of learning.

Notes

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[1] The community service learning component was created through the institutional efforts of the on-campus Community Service Learning Office at the University of San Diego, recently recognized as one of the nation's leading service-learning institutions by Campus Compact (USD was named one of 100 campuses to be nominated for Princeton Review's "Colleges with a Conscience"). The Community Service Learning office hosts "Faculty Curriculum Development Workshops" and invites professors to experiment with service-learning in their courses, offering practical support for infusing community service learning projects into existing and new courses. Their approach is rooted in grassroots efforts to establish liaisons between the University and the surrounding communities. (Most recently the office helped develop and sponsor a course titled, "Community, Consensus and Organizing," in which community leaders are brought in as co-teachers.) In short, the Community Service Learning office at USD offers tremendously valuable support in establishing, maintaining, and coordinating service-learning opportunities.

[2] I would like to thank Arthur Keene for pointing this out to me.

[3] I mistakenly thought that the Chicano and Latino students would have an easier time adjusting to the community service learning experience, perhaps because I knew many of them personally and knew some had immigrant parents. It is important to note, however, that students who identify ethnically with members of their presumed ethnic group will not necessarily have a better understanding of the discrimination experienced by members of that group. This is because social classes, places of origin, and particular "stand points" affect the interactions. One cannot assume that even similarities in phenotype or cultural background will allow for the creation of social bonds, or even minimize distrust (see Twine and Warren 2000). Some of my students came from working class backgrounds and had been exposed to racism and discrimination (one student had even been stopped by a border patrol agent on the way to school). I do not have enough information to determine whether Chicano and Latino students expressed greater affinity with the migrants at the community service learning sites than the other students. In the context of the classroom, however, many Chicano and Latino students expressed greater empathy toward migrants and vocalized these opinions with much less hesitation, in some cases defending migrants when other classmates asserted that they were "breaking the law" by entering the U.S. without documentation.

[4] One Chicana wrote, "After dinner I began to speak to Carlos, an elderly man that appeared to be in his 60s, he greeted me by asking me if I knew when the social worker would get there. I told him I did not know. We then began to converse and he asked me what I thought about the feminist movement and how often I read the bible. It was then that I realized that I was being lectured by this man and questioned about my beliefs. As he spoke I could feel that he thought his viewpoint had more validity than mine. In contrast to the other men that had told me their stories and shared their personal experiences with me, this man thought I should be learning from him." This example illustrates two things. First, the experience shifted the domain of power—the student did not expect "to be lectured." She later told the class that the conversation unnerved her because she did not expect to have a philosophical discussion with a migrant worker. Second, it illustrates how various domains of identity (age, gender, and social class) converge in the service-

learning context. Such differences make it difficult to assert that ethnic identity alone will serve as a catalyst for increased understanding between server and served.

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