



Writing Home or Writing As the Community: Toward a Theory of Recursive Spatial Movement for Students of Color in Service-Learning Courses

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• Most discussions of service-learning focus on the potential pitfalls
• of working with students who inhabit relatively privileged
• positions. While this crucial concern deserves attention, it has
• limited our focus by encouraging students to cross borders,
• to encounter people different from themselves rather than to
• encounter something different within themselves or within their
• own communities. This approach may be particularly problematic
• for students of color whose education for social justice, citizenship,
• and historical consciousness might best be furthered by a writing,
• or might I say a “re-writing,” pedagogy that emphasizes recursive
• spatial movement through place over time—a “writing as the
• community” service-learning paradigm.

*...the Ilongot sense of history [is] conceived of as movement
through space...—Renato Rosaldo*

*I haven't always known this. For a long time, I suffered from
cultural amnesia.—Leny Mendoza Strobel*

I am dreaming of home. In this dream, I am seated in the living room. Sounds of a full house surround me. A former college roommate used to laugh because every time he came to the house, he met yet another person who lived there: grandparents, a great uncle, mom, brothers, an auntie, first and second cousins, two dogs, a dove. A young Filipino



American man of eighteen or twenty years approaches me, bends down to kiss me on the cheek, and walks away. We do not speak. I turn to my companion and say, “I think that was my great-uncle, but I never knew him as a young man, I only knew him as an older man.” This dream came to me during a research project. I had been listening to legacies of what it meant to be Filipina/o in the United States as a colonial subject during the early 1900s. I was particularly interested in the racial climate and economic conditions facing Filipino laborers of that era. Agricultural industrialization, Asian exclusion policies, anti-Filipino riots during the Great Depression, and the enduring effects of Spanish and U.S. colonization created an environment that was often exploitative and hostile.

Finding ways to “not negate” the always-emerging voices of historically underrepresented students, including students of color, is one thread that weaves together my dreams of home, ongoing conversations with scholars/communities of color, and my interest in service-learning. My purpose here, then, is to theorize how service-learning might take shape differently if we designed these courses with historically underrepresented students—students of color specifically—foremost in our minds.³ Service-learning paradigms often assume, for example, that students must move across borders to encounter difference. I propose, instead, a different kind of movement: a recursive spatial movement that asks students to move *within* their own borders or communities, so they might listen for the deeper textures present in the place(s) they might call “home.” This “writing *as* the community” paradigm adds to our current understandings of how students in service-learning courses can work with communities.⁴

In the sections that follow, I examine several assumptions implicit to service-learning—assumptions about the ways students move through communities, toward citizenship, and toward racial awareness—that may not hold true for students of color. Looking to Filipina/o American community-based activists and writers, I theorize an alternative model



of community writing, one that reveals a more recursive, decolonial movement toward the transformations we hope to prompt through service-learning. Finally, I discuss the implications that this model of recursive spatial movement may have for designing service-learning courses for students of color—and for a greater population of students who enjoy varying levels of racial, socioeconomic, and other forms of structural privilege.

Re/Flections of “the Community”

Assumptions about which communities are “in need” and where these communities are located largely inform notions of movement in service-learning. A research project on the community-based, decolonizing methodologies and pedagogies of the Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS) has largely shaped my own vision of how “community” and “movement” might inform service-learning differently. In working through notions of place and space to situate the emergence of FANHS and its approach to eliciting, documenting, and sharing community histories, I have been drawn to theories of service-learning, civic engagement, and place-based pedagogies. But I must admit: for a long time, I have been very uncomfortable with most of the scholarship on service-learning. And I am not alone in my discomfort. Donna Bickford and Nedra Reynolds argue, for example, that service-learning is “too often infused with the volunteer ethos, a philanthropic or charitable viewpoint that ignores the structural reasons to help others” (230). This discourse of volunteerism, argues Margaret Himley, hides power asymmetries and the figure of “the stranger” that “haunts the project of community service learning” (417). These concerns are intricately related to our lack of focus on how community members experience service-learning, or how community members are moved along their own path of becoming writers, engaged citizens, or activists.

In reviewing scholarship on service-learning in rhetoric and composition, Paula Mathieu finds that the focus is often on students



rather than community partners (93). Glynda Hull and Michael Angelo James confirm this lack of attention to community members, warning us that its larger effect is “to relegate the communities served to the shadows, places where adults and youth are sometimes characterized as needy and different or as leading marginal lives” (256). These effects are potentially compounded by what Paula Mathieu describes as the “rapid expansion” of service-learning initiatives and the proliferation of “long-term, top-down institutionalized service-learning programs” that serve as “selling points” for the institution (95-96). Taken together, these cautionary tales remind us that service-learning potentially positions “the community” as the location, or the place where we hope students can encounter difference and emerge transformed. Because this framework potentially positions communities that signify difference as “selling points” for our courses and institutions, we might benefit from alternative theoretical frameworks to understand how students might write not just about, for, or with the community (Deans), but *as* the community.

A “writing *as* the community” paradigm has much to add to current conversations in service-learning, which often assume a distinct boundary between students and the communities they work with or encounter. Much of the scholarship on service-learning, for example, “examines the experiences of white students from privileged backgrounds who serve in communities different from their own” (Davi, Dunlap, and Green 55). While this may be an important dimension of service-learning that deserves attention, it has directed most of our attention on encouraging students to cross borders, and to encounter people different from themselves rather than something different *within* themselves or within their own communities and dwelling places. This approach may be particularly problematic for historically underrepresented students whose education for social justice, citizenship, and historical consciousness might best be furthered by a writing, or a *re*-writing, pedagogy that emphasizes places familiar to them and encourages recursive spatial movement through place over time.



A service-learning approach founded on this kind of re-writing pedagogy might allow underrepresented students to see places they thought familiar in new ways; to see places and the people who dwell in those places as deep sites for historical and public memory that, once excavated, allow them to rewrite landscapes of cultural and historical consciousness. It might also encourage both students and teachers from more privileged backgrounds to broaden their view of the kinds of communities that need “service.” There are many communities that might qualify as “needy” when it comes to, for example, understanding, noticing, disrupting, and dismantling dominant ideologies and everyday practices that maintain structural inequalities and forms of oppression.

Re/Flections of Movement Through “the Community”

Because service-learning is predicated on the idea that we move students, for pedagogical purposes, out of the classroom and into communities, theories of movement are foundational to service-learning. Yet, these often implicit notions of movement that inform service-learning remain undertheorized. Movement informs not just the idea that students move away from the classroom, but the back-and-forth movement characterized well by David Cooper and Eric Fretz, who ask students to “move back and forth between an intellectual reflection on public culture in America and an experiential immersion in it... only through that movement does the vocabulary of democracy truly come alive for our students” (3). Movement also implicitly underpins service-learning courses based on a “writing with the community” paradigm, exemplified by Ellen Cushman’s explanation of collaborations between universities and community partners—and the infrastructures of support required to sustain that work. But where the notion of movement is perhaps most explicitly theorized is in place-based pedagogies. Eric Ball and Alice Lai, for example, theorize relationships between writing, place, and movement through the lens of critical and cultural geographies. Drawing on David Harvey, they situate writing and other forms of cultural production as “moments of



broader social processes” constituted by “a geography of difference” (275). This geography of difference also informs Nedra Reynolds’ work on geographies of writing, an interrogation into the ways geographies become “ingrained, habitual, embodied” and, ultimately, how these embodied geographies travel with students as they move into communities unfamiliar to them (2). As Reynolds argues, these geographies of writing have implications for how we think about the role of movement in service-learning courses.

Reynolds’ theoretical and empirical work demonstrates how reluctant students might move beyond their “habitual pathways” in both physical and conceptual terms. She confirms a common concern articulated by many service-learning scholars: students need strategies for interpreting the difference they encounter. She also significantly challenges assumptions about movement and travel that inform service-learning paradigms. Reynolds writes:

Since geographic research tells us of the reluctance of many people to leave their familiar terrain...or if it’s true that students will not initiate such exploration on their own, then it might be worth thinking about ways to reconcile this reluctance to travel with a growing trend towards service-related or community fieldwork, a trend that extends into many forms of disciplinary work. (114)

Reynolds proposes that we develop pedagogies that encourage students to “dwell” and “inhabit” spaces rather than move or “pass through” them—making way for pedagogies that recognize the role of both movement and dwelling. This, in my view, is the most exciting theoretical insight of Reynolds’ book. But it is also important to note that Reynolds’ notions of movement and dwelling are based, in part, on interviews with cultural geography students at Leeds University. She describes these students as “all white,” as “having the social advantages of race and excellent educational backgrounds,” and as experiencing anxiety as they encounter racial, ethnic, and class tensions while living and moving through several



neighborhoods, including a “mixed residential” neighborhood where many South Asian immigrants have settled (87). This data, and the larger tendency of service-learning discourse in our discipline to focus on more privileged students, might lead Reynolds to see the acts of dwelling and movement in opposition when she writes:

People’s responses to place—which are shaped in large part by their bodies... determine whether they will “enter” at all, or rush through, or linger—and those decisions contribute to how a space is “used” or reproduced. Bodies and places impact upon each other; a body becomes marked with the residue of place, but places are also changed by the presence of bodies. Those changes can’t happen, however, if people won’t *cross* borders, won’t engage with a *new* place, or can’t overcome their fear or aversion to a particular location. (143, emphasis mine)

Service-learning’s predominant assumption that “change” only happens when we move across borders precludes the possibility that change can happen by moving recursively over time within the same space or dwelling. As anthropologist Martin Manalansan argues, for Asian Americans and others who often inhabit marginalized locations, movement is not always about traveling or crossing borders. He writes:

It is imperative to view not only the crossings that occur in these spaces but those that are curtailed, hampered, or even marooned, and how people navigate their abject status not only *across* but also *within* such spaces. Travel, mobility, and the romance of multiple physical locales may be enticing and yet, in the final analysis, they render an incomplete portrait of people in the margins. (5, emphasis his)⁵

Manalansan reminds us that pedagogies of dwelling should include an attention to multiple kinds of movement—the movements of both students and community members across and *within* the borders



defined/assumed by any particular service-learning site. Service-learning asks students to cross borders to encounter difference but has not sufficiently thought about how these border-crossings might render an incomplete portrait of that difference. An approach that asks students to dwell, to move through a place recursively over time, might enable a more effective lens on difference than one that merely juxtaposes what seems different with what feels familiar. Dwelling might help students focus less on their own border-crossings and more on the kinds of movements and “moments of immobility” that occur within communities/places—and how these im/mobilities illustrate the collage of differences within a place or community (Manalansan 5).

Re/Flections of Becoming: Moving Students Toward Citizenship

Manalansan broadens our understanding of movement and prompts us to consider how service-learning assumptions might curtail or hamper the paths of becoming for community members, historically underrepresented students, and students of color in particular. We have spent a good deal of time wrestling with the question of how to reduce the anxiety and increase the learning of what several scholars have described as privileged, white, middle-class students. We have not, however, spent much time wrestling with how students who identify with communities marked by difference manage other kinds of anxieties and pedagogical challenges in service-learning courses. What models of service-learning might better support these students on their path to becoming writers, citizens, advocates, activists, and teachers without “negating their emerging voice” and self (Strobel)? What might service-learning look like if we started with historically underrepresented students in mind? How might this starting point reshape the ways we define place and movement in service-learning paradigms?⁶

One reason teachers are motivated to incorporate service-learning components into their courses is to encourage students to become better writers, engaged citizens, and passionate advocates for social change. In



many ways, then, scholarly discourse on service-learning can be read as a master narrative of literacy infused with common assumptions about education, individual achievement, transformation, social mobility, and citizenship. In U.S. culture, Morris Young reminds us, “stories about education and literacy are often read as stories about becoming American, about the transformation from cultural Other into legitimate American subjects” (29). And while all students might struggle with this transformation toward U.S. citizenship, Young’s work suggests that students who inhabit racialized subject positions may struggle differently. For example, Asian American students who are often marked as perpetual foreigners (and therefore not U.S. citizens) may struggle to find ways to “both challenge and re/vision the discourses of literacy, race, and citizenship in order to create socially responsible and just action” (Young 52). Young’s work prompts us to take a closer look at the implicit assumptions about citizenship or “becoming” embedded in the design of service-learning courses—or at least a closer look at whether students are faring well under these assumptions.

In *Reflections*’ special issue devoted to “exploring diversity in community-based writing and literacy programs,” guest editor Andrew Wurr directs special attention to an article by Angelique Davi, Michelle Dunlap, and Ann E. Green because “they investigate the complexity that characterizes familiar categories and terminology used to describe diverse populations in multicultural setting and societies” (4). Davi, Dunlap, and Greene report that students of color expressed different kinds of anxieties than white students in the same service-learning course. These students of color were less likely to “point to glaring distinctions of race, class, and gender between the university and the service-learning site,” and were more likely to already have experience with “navigating cross-cultural differences” (Davi, et al. 56). But, “anxiety around issues of race,” they note, were not completely absent for these students of color (56). The racism these students encountered at service-learning sites compounded the racism they continually experienced or witnessed on campus. Memories of how they were treated in elementary and high school provoked anxiety as they



entered elementary classrooms—as service-learning sites—in relative positions of power.

Davi, Dunlap, and Green’s findings suggest that students of color approach service-learning as an opportunity not just to give back to a community, but also as an opportunity to rewrite their past and, by extension, the past/history of the community. This commitment to community empowerment expressed by students of color confirms Marilynne Boyle-Baise and Christine E. Sleeter’s findings that students of color, in contrast to white students, were more likely to hold activist views of service-learning and less likely to see communities through a deficit view.⁷ This work—further confirmed in rhetorics of color scholarship by, for example, Morris Young, Jacqueline Jones Royster, Malea Powell, and Gwendolyn D. Pough— suggests that students of color are motivated to give *communities* greater agency, a concern that gets considerably less attention in service-learning discussions because of our (necessary) concern with student agency.

Students of color, then, might benefit from a re-writing pedagogy, one that explicitly foregrounds an activist stance toward the communities with which they already identify—a pedagogy of recursive spatial movement. While we have paid great attention to how service-learning courses might impact the civic and racial identity development of white students, we have not always paid the same attention to how these courses might impact the civic and racial identity development of students of color. The implicit assumption is that students of color do not need help with this component of their becoming; that their identity, in the words of Stuart Hall, is “an already accomplished fact” (222). But if, as Hall argues, identity is a continual process of production, then we might reflect on these assumptions differently. Hall writes:

Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of “becoming” as well as “being.” It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history,



and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture, and power. Far from being grounded in a mere “recovery” of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (225)

Hall is particularly concerned with theorizing Caribbean cultural identity and diaspora but his theory of identity can be taken to theorize the identity development, the process of becoming, for white students and students of color. One key difference, however, is that these students (and the community members with whom they might work) will be positioned differently in relationship to perhaps divergent narratives of a shared past which could impact the paths they forge in their civic and racial becoming.

The idea that students of color may need different resources, including culturally relevant curricula, to forge their paths of becoming has been documented by education and literacy scholars (see, for example, Ladson-Billings; Pewewardy; Li). Readers of *Reflections* may also be familiar with Beverly Tatum’s work on racial identity development, cited in articles by Wurr and by Davi, Dunlap, and Green in a 2007 special issue exploring diversity. Utilizing two models—one for black racial identity development and one for white racial identity development—Tatum shows how this development is intricately tied to students’ past experiences with race, including the narratives about race and racism that have come to resonate with that experience.⁸ Tatum also notes that students who are at certain stages of their racial identity development might benefit from their participation and membership in “special-interest groups, such as the Black Student Union or the Asian Student Alliance” (23). Tatum’s recommendation



is further confirmed by Keith Osajima's study of the process of "Asian American conscientization" among fifty-three college students. For these Asian American students, interactions with other Asian Americans were crucial in supporting their path toward critical consciousness. They "realized they were not alone, that others had similar family and cultural experiences, and experiences with racial discrimination," allowing them to see their own experience as "part of the [larger] Asian American experience" (69). A similar argument might be made about service-learning experiences: during certain stages of students' civic and racial becoming, they might benefit from immersion in their own histories and/or communities. Students of color, in particular, might benefit from a re-writing pedagogy, one that explicitly foregrounds an activist stance toward the communities with which they already identify or belong—a pedagogy of recursive spatial movement.

Re/Flections of Recursive Spatial Movement: Moving within *as* the Community

So what might this recursive spatial movement look like? From what examples might we best theorize this movement? Rather than draw from theoretical foundations commonly cited by service-learning practitioners,⁹ I begin instead with community-based activists, citizens, and writers. As renowned Asian American Detroit activist Grace Lee Boggs reminds us, "active citizenship requires being rooted in and feeling responsible for a place—a community, a city, and/or country" (3). Moreover, if we want our students to become engaged citizens and passionate advocates for communities, what better models than those of activists long committed to the cause? Change, in the words of Boggs, "takes place in living systems, not from above but from within, from many local actions occurring simultaneously" (7). Thus, to illustrate how dwelling and movement within one's own community can inform service-learning approaches, I turn to theoretical visions of recursive spatial movement in the work of Filipino American writers/activists Carlos Bulosan, Dorothy Laigo Cordova, and Fred Cordova.¹⁰ In doing



so, I make the not so implicit argument that there is particular power in recovering not just activist practices but also activist *visions*, and to see them as *theories* of civic engagement and social change. These theories may serve as important models for students of color who more often approach service-learning courses with an activist view (Boyle-Baise and Sleeter; Davi, Dunlap, and Greene). These visions also remind us that notions of place, movement, and dwelling are central to service-learning models committed to fostering greater agency among both students and communities.¹¹

Carlos Bulosan was a poet, novelist, and labor activist most known to mainstream U.S. audiences for his novel, *America Is in the Heart*. When he was eighteen, he migrated to the United States as an “American national,” pushed from poverty created by centuries of imperialism under Spain and the United States, and pulled by implicit and explicit promises of “America.” Arriving in Seattle in 1930 at the height of the Great Depression, Bulosan was a colonial subject and therefore ineligible for citizenship. He was unable to secure stable employment or earn a living wage, and subject to widespread exploitation and racial hostility. Bulosan’s peasant and working-class background, as well as his political commitments, shaped his life’s work (Espiritu 46). His biography reveals, in the words of Marilyn C. Alquizola and Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, “a complex, multi-faceted man”:

What is certain is that, during the height of the Great Depression in the 1930s, Carlos Bulosan initiated a line of work that was to become an integral dimension of his evolution as an author. He began to work as a writer on behalf of the incipient union movement in California and the west, and thus sought to express the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of the working class.

Thus, Bulosan exemplifies the kind of writer many of us hope our students will become: a writer strongly committed to the people, place, and knowledge-making needs of a community, and writing for



social advocacy and social change. Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* can be read as a theory of recursive spatial movement, one that has empowering potential for both writers and communities and important implications for theories of movement that inform service-learning.

Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* is often thought to be merely autobiographical; in Asian American and Ethnic Studies, however, the text is widely read as a social commentary on the collective struggle of many West Coast Filipino migrant workers during the early 1900s. This collective struggle is portrayed through the story of Carlos: his early life as a peasant in the Philippines, his migration to and struggles in "America," and his becoming a writer committed to social justice for Filipino farmworkers in the United States. Tracing the sheer number of geographic places Carlos passes through as a migrant worker, Sau-Ling Wong calls our attention to how the geographic and upward mobility of Carlos is continually restricted, and his aspirations continually unrealized (134). This protagonist's recursive spatial movement through the U.S. landscape is a direct critique of the progressive linear movement of assimilation and citizenship promised by the American Dream. Bulosan evokes a visceral feel for the recursive (imperialist) movement experienced by many Filipinos of this era—away from the Philippines to agricultural migrant camps in the United States and then on a circular path that simultaneously takes them everywhere and nowhere—meant to circulate Filipinos (as labor capital) dictated by the agricultural industry. Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* emphasizes a common theme in Asian American writing: restricted movement, immobility, and exclusion rather than a linear movement toward citizenship (Young 86). This movement also starkly contrasts with the kinds of border-crossing movements we hope students undertake in their service-learning courses.

Reading *America Is in the Heart* as a literacy narrative, Young argues that becoming a writer does not allow Carlos to attain the idea of "American citizenship" that continually eludes him as a racialized



subject, but it does become a “liberating practice that in the end gives him the means for cultural criticism” (93-94). Young notes that the publication of Carlos’ first book brings his “literacy narrative to a symbolic climax,” but we might also look to the places in *America Is in the Heart* where Carlos writes *with* the community and *as* the community (93). As Carlos becomes involved with the Filipino farm workers’ movement, he begins writing for a number of struggling labor movement magazines. Under Deans’s heuristic for service-learning paradigms, in this context Carlos is writing *with* the community but, I argue, he is also writing *as* the community—because he writes with other Filipinos who are committed to empowering their own community, he sees himself as participating in something “important in the history of Filipino social awakening” (Bulosan 193). These moments of writing *as* the community are crucial to Carlos’ civic and racial becoming. Carlos reflects on his experience working with other writers to revive *The New Tide*, a magazine for Filipino farm workers:

But what awed me, in those early days, were the sacrifices of the founders. I would ask myself why three starving men were willing to give up their hard-earned money to make an obscure magazine live, denying themselves the simple necessities of food and shelter. They had surrounded the publication as though it were a little life about to die, or dying, or dead—and breathed life into it one after the other, looking desperate and lost when they realized that their efforts were futile. But it was an inspiring experience, watching these young men breathing life into a dead thing. Their efforts came to me again and again in the course of my struggle toward an intellectual clarification and a positive social attitude. (194)

Writing *with* and *as* the community enables Carlos to work toward social change and empowerment of his community, but it also has lasting impact on his own civic and racial becoming.



Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* theorizes Carlos' journey to becoming (a writer, a Filipino in the United States, a community member committed to a cause) as recursive spatial movement. As Carlos becomes a writer, he moves through geographic places he has been before, encountering people he has met before. His recursive spatial movement through the community allows him to gather a collective, alternative institutional memory to rewrite a larger story of the labor movement. As a colonized subject, Carlos is relegated to certain geographic places and what some might see as "the margins" of city life; his movements are prescribed and constricted. As a writer, he appropriates these spaces and movements to build a critique that develops through his own recursive spatial movement within and beyond the borderland, for example, of Filipino migrant camps. We can imagine Bulosan, through his labor union activities, collecting the stories of many, many men by moving recursively through the community, and finding a way to represent these stories *and* this recursive spatial movement in his text through the story of Carlos.¹² In doing so, Bulosan theorizes what it means to write *as* the community. Carlos writes as part of a larger collective that shares—continually lives with—not just a local, but also an (inter) national problem. Recursive spatial movement over time within his community allows Carlos to learn the history of this problem, the social justice movements that are actively working to address it, and the kinds of writing activities that might begin to raise awareness both within and beyond the community.

A model of writing as recursive spatial movement recognizes that this movement is never complete. The community landscape, its history, and the problems it confronts are always changing and require a continual attention to rewriting. When Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* was published in 1946, it received critical acclaim from mainstream U.S. audiences and reviewers. Its reprint in 1973 by University of Washington Press with a new introduction by Carey McWilliams symbolized a renewed interest in labor and ethnic histories. This renewed interest in Bulosan's book became part of



another exigence for rewriting the community and the founding of the Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHHS). The history behind the founding of FANHHS is strongly rooted in both dwelling and movement—especially in the dwelling and movement of two Filipino American activists Fred and Dorothy Cordova. For more than twenty-five years prior to FANHHS’s founding, the Cordovas were lifetime partners in the Civil Rights, Asian American, and Filipina/o American movements, with a particularly strong presence in and commitment to the Filipino American community of Seattle, Washington. Dorothy Laigo Cordova is Founder and Executive Director of FANHHS; Fred Cordova is Founding President Emeritus of FANHHS and Founder of the National Pinoy Archives associated with FANHHS. The Cordovas exemplify the kinds of writers we hope students will become: they write in multiple genres for multiple audiences, they are engaged citizens and community activists, and they teach other community members how to research and write about their history. The story and theoretical vision behind FANHHS shows how change happens not just by crossing borders to encounter difference, but learning how to dwell within a place or community of people *with* a difference.

When a Washington State representative approached Dorothy Laigo Cordova to lead a research project on the history of Filipino laborers of Bulosan’s era, she was concerned about how the project was being defined:

Especially when he said all he wanted to do was the history of Filipino men, who went to Alaska and who worked in the fields. And I said, “Well we’re more than that.” And he says, “Well, in Bulosan’s book...” That’s why I thought, “Oh God, do I have to deal with that garbage again?” And I said, “Well, Carlos wrote fiction. And he wasn’t writing the history of our people. He was writing a slice of life.” (D. Cordova)

Because of the paucity of texts available on Filipino American history, this Washington State representative was familiar with only one text:



Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart*. According to Fred Cordova, there were also Asian American professors at this time who knew very little about Filipino American history outside of that represented in Bulosan's book: "a literature piece, which all of a sudden [they] treated as a history book." These narratives about their history prompted the Cordovas to rewrite the narrative by documenting the history of a community they had moved through for years. Fred Cordova who grew up in Stockton, California (also known as "Little Manila") explicitly connects his knowledge of his community's history to dwelling in a place when he says, "It wasn't so much just studying history [as it was] that history was there in the sidewalk."

Dorothy Cordova grew up in Seattle, Washington. The founding and national chapter of FANHS is housed in the former Catholic school associated with the Immaculate Conception Church in the Central Area of Seattle, a neighborhood that has been (until recent decades) historically populated by people of color. As such, it was also a neighborhood that witnessed civil rights marches, civil disobedience, and the formation of the Seattle Chapter of the Black Panther Party. Dorothy Cordova grew up in this neighborhood and attended school in the very building where FANHS is now located. The former Filipino Youth Activities, Inc., also cofounded by the Cordovas, was located down the hall for many years. Dorothy Cordova's story of dwelling and spatial movement within her own Seattle Filipino American community illustrates how her recursive spatial movement revealed to her deeper textures of her community and her community's history.

When Dorothy Cordova agreed to conduct an oral history project for Washington State she did so on the condition that she would have greater control in defining the parameters of the project. Knowing the community landscape had more texture than that represented in Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart*, she began to map stories she wanted to uncover and identified people she wanted her team to interview. Her



recursive spatial movement through the community allowed her to uncover stories that even she had not known before. She explains:

I wanted to interview this one man who not only worked in the lunch program and helped underwrite it when they were in the hole, but he also was the first Filipino man I knew who fixed TVs—so I thought that was a different kind of a twist. So I made an appointment to interview him when they closed down the lunch program for the day, and I was asking questions. . . All of a sudden, this man I knew, and worked next to for years, was giving me another [dimension]. So, here is a man, and he must have been in his seventies then, and he just started to tell me this story of why they started the union. (D. Cordova)

This is how Cordova came to see Tony Rodrigo, one of the pioneering activists in the Filipino Cannery Workers' and Farm Laborers' Union, differently from how she had previously known him as a Seattle community member. Cordova's movement and dwelling within in her own community, then, helped rewrite her own narrative of Rodrigo as well as a larger historical narrative of Filipino Americans in the labor movement. And it is this recursive spatial movement that Cordova works to teach other members of a larger imagined community.

Cordova has often spoken of FANHS as a podium—a space where community-based researchers can share the histories they have lived or collected; a space for community dialogue across generations, across immigration waves, and across difference within a community. Just as we can hear notions of dwelling and movement in her own research narrative, we can hear them in Cordova's vision of FANHS as a space for (re)writing Filipino American history. She explains:

You know, I like to compare Filipino American history or even all kinds of history: it's like a great big beach that's not sandy. It's like the beaches we have in the Northwest are full of stone. And



so, when you ask people to give you history, some of them will just tell you about a beach that's all white sand. And others will say, well, there's a beach with a whole bunch of rocks. What I want people in FANHS to do is to say, there's a beach with rocks, but under every rock, there's a different story. And to go down. And possibly even / for them to dig down / and find what's further down. That, to me, is community research. (D. Cordova)

For Cordova, the recursive spatial movements through space that can rewrite historical knowledge and consciousness are embodied by many, many community members moving across the beach and looking under every rock, rather than grouping rocks solely by time or waves of immigration. She asks community-based researchers to dwell and move among community members with a difference until we begin to see in more textured dimensions. FANHS, as Dorothy Cordova envisions it, serves as an essential space that teaches community members this recursive spatial movement and provides them with “a podium” for sharing the deeper textures of the community uncovered through that movement. This podium positions Filipino Americans as authorities on their own experiences and their own communities—authorities who are capable of producing, publishing, and disseminating this knowledge among community members and to larger audiences. Learning to dwell—in the places of community and the spaces created by FANHS—becomes a method through which Filipino Americans might learn about themselves in the Gramscian sense, and give themselves better methods for negotiating borderlands.

Like Bulosan, the Cordovas theorize community-based (re)writing as recursive spatial movement. It is also important to note that (re)writing the historical landscape is seen as a *collective* undertaking—something done *as* the community and *with* the community. Bulosan and the Cordovas recognize the power of not only producing written knowledge but also the power in owning that knowledge. For example, sitting among the files in the Pinoy National Archives (NPA),¹³ Fred



Cordova explains how these archives are essential to his vision of FANHS as an organization rooted in community:

It is the policy so far of FANHS, that all of this stuff is not going to go to the Library of Congress... or...the Smithsonian...It will always be accessible to the community. Some of the things in that file [cabinet] were done by fifth graders. What happens if some of these fifth graders do not go to college?

The archives, in other words, are a space and a place created, used, and owned by the community. This may not, unfortunately, shed favorable light on service-learning initiatives that ask students from outside of the community to cross borders and write for, about, or with the community. The philosophy behind FANHS recognizes the power inherent in writing *as* the community and speaks to the importance of creating service-learning paradigms that enable students of color to give greater agency to the (often historically underrepresented) communities with which they may already identify. We have more work to do, then, in theorizing and implementing service learning programs that consider the “becoming” of students and community members. A theory of recursive spatial movement—a pedagogy that teaches students to move and dwell differently in a community they may already know—may be an important foundation for shifting our service-learning paradigms.

Further Re/Flections on Writing As the Community: (Re)Writing Home

If students of color are more likely to approach service-learning courses with robust (rather than deficit) views of “the community,” and are more likely to take an activist stance toward/with their communities (Boyle-Baise and Sleeter), then service-learning paradigms need to shift to more fully engage these capabilities. A “writing *as* the community” paradigm recognizes communities not just as places of need but as places where people do what Jeff Grabill has called “the



knowledge work of citizenship” (15). If, as Grabill reminds us, the community is both a place where members hold complex expertise and a space where members often “confront exigencies that demand new knowledge production on their part in order to tell an alternative story about identity, capability, and place,” (14) then a “writing *as* the community” model can provide students with opportunities to foster and sustain this knowledge work. This happens when students learn to dwell differently with a community familiar to them: feeling deeper textures, hearing “the different story under every rock,” seeing the complicated exigencies confronting their communities, and re/writing the histories of movement and social action that have taken place in their lives and communities.

This “writing *as* the community” paradigm also supports several goals of service-learning approaches cited by Deans, including (1) having students write for and with non-academic audiences, (2) helping students to “develop critical consciousness and habits of intellectual inquiry and social critique,” and (3) giving students practical experience working with community members to “negotiate cultural differences and forge shared discourses” (17). And because this paradigm recognizes the knowledge students already have about their communities, this model may also address another common problem cited by service-learning practitioners: that students often do not have enough background-knowledge about a community, a sense of the ongoing issues and conversations present in that community, nor a strong sense of audience and purpose when faced with writing tasks deeply embedded in community contexts (Bacon; Bickford and Reynolds). Further recursive spatial movement within communities already familiar to them might help students develop an even deeper knowledge of these rhetorical contexts by foregrounding “the role text and genre play in growing, sustaining, and dismantling communities as well as the role that texts play in the circulation of such social goods as knowledge, wealth, resources, power, and prestige” (Kells 94).



Important work in rhetorics of color might provide further guidance in developing courses based on recursive spatial movement. Service-learning models that work with students of color have been implemented and published (see, for example, Pough; Halagao; Kells). While these models may not explicitly refer to their courses as employing the methods of movement and dwelling that I have theorized here, their approaches have affinity with the theory of recursive spatial movement I have described. But let me also offer some words of caution as well: in shifting our attention away from “privileged, white, middle-class students” and toward the diverse range of students who may not fit this description, we also risk generalizing across students of color and across other historically underserved or underrepresented students. For example, as Kevin Nadal argues, the identity development model for Filipino American students may be different from that of other Asian American students due to a number of factors, including a history of Spanish and U.S. colonization, traces of “Malay, Muslim, East Asian, Pacific Islander, and Indonesian” cultural influences, educational barriers, identification as a “brown” rather than a “yellow” race, and marginalization within both Asian American and more mainstream U.S. communities (45-47).

Nor can we assume, as Patricia Espiritu Halagao argues, that students whose histories and communities have been largely “absent from school curricula [including service-learning courses] will embrace one that finally reflects their histories, stories, and perspectives” (461). In her study of Filipino American students in a service-learning course centered around “a transformative multicultural curriculum on Filipino history and culture,” Halagao finds that while these students were able to fill in gaps in their historical memories and move toward building a deeper sense of community, they also experienced cultural collisions. Their identity transformations, she notes, “reflected a complex interplay among their prior knowledge, historical and racial identity, and a transformative curriculum about their ethnic history and culture” (473). Halagao’s work demonstrates the greater need for us to understand the



challenges facing students of color not only when they are absent from our curricula, but also (and perhaps more so) when we ask students of color to place their ethnic and racial selves, communities, and histories at the center of our curricula.

Implementing a model requires thoughtful planning and continual re/assessment. We cannot ask students to enter their home communities without providing them with a structure for understanding its history and for interacting differently with community members they may already know. This may require, as Zeus Leonardo suggests, a deeper engagement with race in theories of critical pedagogy. Students will also have different levels of knowledge about their histories, stories, perspectives, and communities—and may identify with these histories/communities differently. Students who feel emotionally distant from or marginalized within their communities may need special strategies for interrogating the boundaries and conflicts that always exist inside of any community. And students who are physically distant from their home communities may need strategies for moving back and forth (geographically and virtually) between “home” and perhaps a more local community with which they have affinity.

How might a “writing *as* the community” paradigm serve the greater number of students, including “privileged, white, middle-class students,” at predominantly white institutions of higher education? One model is University of Illinois’ “Ethnography of the University” (EOTU) model, which asks students to dwell and move within their own university community by doing research “*on* the university” as a site of “diverse prose, statistical, and visual narratives that communicate complex and often conflicting institutional values, commitments, and identities” (1). Another model that explicitly foregrounds an attention to movement through place is Reynolds’ “Mapping URI” project, in which students analyze the university as a familiar space that may still feel alien to them (158). Informed by theories of cultural geography, Reynolds’ approach is meant to help students feel, see, and articulate how “structural forms of exclusion



are built into neighborhoods, factories, parks, and college campuses” (Reynolds and Bickford 243). These two models help displace dominant service-learning narratives that tend to position communities as the site of difference and the place for intervention. But while these models encourage students to dwell and to write as the (university) community, they do not quite get at the notion of recursive spatial movement as a method for re-writing the narratives that define/position “home.”

We might also need to theorize and implement more complex models of recursive spatial movement for more privileged students so they do not always see communities—“across the border” or “in the streets”—as the place for intervention, or the place where social problems are located. Rather, they might see their own communities as partially responsible for creating these “problems.” In other words, what models can encourage these students to also want to (re)write home? One approach is to have students dwell in a place long (and deep) enough so they are able to unpack or map some of the different kinds of spatial movements that converge in a given place. Bulosan’s and Cordova’s theoretical visions, for example, could inform a service-learning course subtitled, “Travel, Migration, and Exile.” This course might juxtapose narratives of tourism with narratives of exile to help students see the many reasons people cross borders, and the ways tourists, locals, im/migrants, and exiles have different structural geographies of movement through a shared location. Connecting these divergent but intersecting geographies of movement to vocabularies of structural difference can help reveal why tourism often ignores the memory and geography of people and place, how tourism impacts local communities, and how different “home” communities are implicated in or impacted by these processes. Students might then rewrite these geographies of movement. They might redesign tourist programs in their own neighborhood, university, city, or state. They might design tours, targeted at their home communities, that foreground these divergent movements through a place. Or, they might rewrite the way forms of travel and tourism are marketed to their home communities.



It is worth repeating that a structural vocabulary is a crucial component to any service-learning model informed by geographies of movement. As the theories of Bulosan and the Cordovas tell us, it is this structural understanding that better allows students (and us) to see the systemic ways certain places, movements, and histories are seen as marginal, and how these structural differences are mapped onto the ways people *move* recursively through a place, repeatedly over time. Without that vocabulary, students may not be learning how to dwell at all and they will miss home as a site for: understanding structural difference, excavating divergent historical and public memories, and recovering legacies of social justice and knowledge work. My hope is that these re/visions of home, brought into focus through recursive spatial movement, can provide students with a deeper sense of social change and a deeper sense of what it would mean to re/write home.

Endnotes

¹ I use the term *listening* here as theorized and enacted by Malea Powell and Jacqueline Jones Royster. For further reading on my notion of listening, see Monberg, “Listening for Legacies,” 2008.

² I give thanks to my elders and ancestors, mentors and *comadres*, who have patiently fostered my own recursive spatial movement through place(s) over time.

³ My intention is not to conflate the terms “historically underrepresented students” and “students of color.” Students within each of these categories may face varying degrees of structural disadvantage and/or privilege.

⁴ For example, Thomas Deans names three paradigms for community writing: “writing *for* the community,” “writing *about* the community,” and “writing *with* the community.”

⁵ Manalansan’s critique was written in response to multi-sited ethnography but also serves as a cautionary tale for service-learning and community fieldwork pedagogies.



⁶ We have often assumed “privileged, white, middle-class students” as the norm but we might also ask how service-learning courses historically taught at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and institutions serving large numbers of Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders might challenge assumptions about place and movement.

⁷ Boyle-Baise and Sleeter outline a continuum of development that includes four views of service-learning: deficit views, affirmative views, pragmatic views, and activist views.

⁸ It is important to note that Tatum’s research stems from her interest in “racial identity development among African-American youth raised in predominantly White communities” (2). Thus, racial identity models for African-American youth (and other youth of color including mixed-race youth) raised or attending school in predominantly Black or Brown communities may look very different.

⁹ According to Bickford and Reynolds, “service-learning practitioners commonly cite Jane Addams, John Dewey, and Dorothy Day as early-twentieth-century models....and Paulo Freire as a more recent one” (238). Deans also finds that Linda Flower, Elenore Long, Wayne Peck and others at Pittsburgh’s Community Literacy Center (CLC) cite Cornel West as a model for their approach (117). I find myself, however, wanting to hear more from CLC’s Joyce Baskins whose biography describes her as someone who “comes from a prophetic family of social activists on the Northside of Pittsburgh and can trace her family through ten generations of community activists in the Pittsburgh area” <http://english.cmu.edu/research/clc/default.html>.

¹⁰ While Carlos Bulosan wrote fiction and the Cordovas are writing history, they share similar strategies for community-based writing including recursive spatial movement.

¹¹ It is important to note that an activist model of what we now call “service-learning” was foundational to the first Asian American Studies programs founded at University of California-Berkeley and San Francisco State in 1968.

¹² In fact, Bulosan biographer, P.C. Morantte, and Bulosan’s brother have both characterized Carlos Bulosan as “a good listener” (see *Espiritu* 62).



¹³ The acronym for the National Pinoy Archives (NPA) purposefully calls forth the acronym for the New People's Army (NPA), a revolutionary group affiliated with the Community Party of the Philippines (CPP) that organizes workers in the *barrios* and has been categorized as a terrorist organization by the U.S. Department of State.

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