

Spring 2015

Using your inside voice: The place of a global service learner

Victoria M. Price
James Madison University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/honors201019>

 Part of the [Nonfiction Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Price, Victoria M., "Using your inside voice: The place of a global service learner" (2015). *Senior Honors Projects, 2010-current*. 35.
<https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/honors201019/35>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors College at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Honors Projects, 2010-current by an authorized administrator of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.

Using Your Inside Voice: The Place of a
Global Service Learner

An Honors Program Project Presented to
the Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Arts and Letters
James Madison University

by Victoria Morgan Price
May 2015

Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors Program

FACULTY COMMITTEE:

Project Advisor: Elisabeth Gunnior, Ph.D.,
Associate Professor, Writing, Rhetoric and
Technical Communication

Reader: Heather Comfort
Assistant Professor, Writing, Rhetoric
and Technical Communication

Reader: Felix Wang, M.B.A, M.Ed
Director, Study Abroad

HONORS PROGRAM APPROVAL:

Philip Frana, Ph.D.,
Interim Director, Honors Program

PUBLIC PRESENTATION

This work is accepted for presentation, in part or in full, at Harrison Hall 2239 on April 27, 2015.

Table of Contents

Preface	3
Acknowledgements	4
Chapter One: Securing Authority in Service Learning Experience	5
Chapter Two: Achieving Commodious Language	15
Chapter Three: Intersecting Context with Experience	25
Chapter Four: Service through Social Capital	36
Bibliography	44

Preface

This thesis combines research writing with personal narrative to document and analyze the process of a service learner. I often engage in a literary analysis of my own narrative work to elicit the steps in the evolution of service learning within an individual. As a student of an institution that strives to be the national model of an engaged university, I hope that my work will be of pedagogical use as institutions further develop service learning programs. Much research about themes such as capitalism, democracy, neoliberalist economic theory, education, service, and the liberation theory as related to the Dominican Republic are combined with theories that I have learned in the school of Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication. Although completed for an Honors Program requirement, I will continue to work and live with what I have written.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend a sincere nod of gratitude to my advisor and mentor, Dr. Elisabeth Gumnior. Without her reassurance, spirit, and unending support, I would never have kept the faith until this book's completion. Professor Heather Comfort has guided me to know myself as a personal narrative writer, opening up a genre that has lifted and inspired me. For that, I thank her dearly. I would like to recognize Dr. Scott Lunsford as a professor who encouraged me to cultivate my ability to research and analyze pieces of this world as artifacts which speak volumes about humanity. Professor Felix Wang, as an instructor, practicum advisor, thesis reader, and role model has illuminated the Dominican Republic, my path of service learning, and my educational future. I am deeply indebted to his dedication to my development as a student and as a person. Finally, I want to acknowledge Joanny Peralta for the time she piles into restoring Dominican rights and for connecting me with so many Dominican individuals who have substantially impacted my life.

Chapter One: Securing Authority in Service Learning Experience

“Clean water and health care and school and food and tin roofs and cement floors, all of these things should constitute a fset of basics that people must have as birthrights.”

- Dr. Paul Farmer

You are literate. If you are reading this and like me, then you have been shuttled through a rail line of education to get to a yard full of train cars. Each metal container locked up until you present forth a resume and recommendation of your promising nature, and then you are organized in a fashion that permits you to work and live. Working and living function as basics of opportunity. But learning lends a base to the basics: something to stand on, something to reach from, something to know. Through a service learning program in my sophomore and junior years at James Madison University, I came to know different groups of people who asked for more; they asked for what I have. By chronicling my experience in the Dominican Republic with narrative and contextual research, I am able to trace the place, purpose and process of service learning. Below is a narrative bridge that I built between myself and people who ask for birthrights.

Their Asbury Angus

Ocean mountains. That ole Blue Ridge Mountain Range filed down to soft waves of

azure, systematically crashing through the Shenandoah Valley. Blurry with my tears but sharp in outline with my raging, squinting concentration. I stomp up the steep green hill with the purpose of a preacher stepping up into a pulpit.

“Talking doesn’t seem to work, so this time I will be shouting,” I give a dignified update.
Silence.

The pungent smell of a dried up cow patty wafts up to my nose as I am eyeballing the halfway point. I am sliding past. Pause. Blackjack, my family’s pet baby cow, peers at me with heavy eyelids and the concern of an interrupted musician. His whole left hind side is plastered with lighter shades of brown. He is pure Angus beef, and he stands as temporary mascot for the farm we call Asbury Angus, for the home we call Asbury Angus. I stare back at him.

“I suppose you would like to join me in bellowing to God?”

His disinterest drives him back to licking the salt block with his disproportionately-colored pink and gray tongue. He makes me feel melancholy; a step down from indignation.

I cock my head to the side to breathe the freshly bush hogged field and evening dew. My stomping slows to a constant march. God has never shouted back, but this time I feel as if he really hasn’t properly considered listening and responding. I figure absurd shouting in the middle of a symbolically green pasture should at least draw out His irony.

“God has a sense of humor,” my mom sighs the southern adage in my memory.

“Okay, then, funny world. Reveal yourself! Let me revel in your wit and charm.”

Blackjack turns back to me. I decide I want to touch the white star precariously balancing between the long, thick lashes heaped above his dark eyes. Cow fur is so thin; I feel his thick skin. Concentrate. Okay.

A brilliant sun stands in permanent state of volcanic eruption right behind the cool mountain wave. One step further and the hill would drop like an anchor pulling towline; I rest at the tippy top. The prickle of summer grass beneath my calves and behind my knees triggers a memory: Sky, black, sky, black, I am barrel rolling down the cow patty-speckled slope. My brother tumbles close behind in a fit of girlish giggles. We love to roll down the steep farm hills when the evening brings cool air. We call it summer sledding. The solar eruption takes cover beneath the mountain, leaving the valley void of its golden brushstrokes, but leaves remnants of pink wisps stuttering across the sky. My parents' divorce is prying me from this farm and pairing it with a vacant, irrelevant face. I whisper.

“Why then, would I be raised here?”

Homeless suddenly differentiates itself from shelterless. The thought hunches my spine, and I let my tears roll into the soil. I'm shaking. I'm sobbing. I'm shouting.

“BUT THIS IS BASE. YOU CAN'T TAG ME HERE! EVEN IF YOU ARE GOD.

Even though you are God.”

The wind dries my face until it just looks like I've sneezed twelve times in a row. I can feel my eyes shining and my mascara connecting dots between my freckles. I'm beginning to wander down the hill to a pond that resembles an oversized mud puddle. The breeze blows and goose bumps rise on my arms, so I turn around and wearily pull my legs into a brisk walk. I figure the 35 acres of farmland and 10 acres of woodland is expansive enough for me to revisit in secret when the farm is sold. People typically only shoot at male trespassers around here. I console myself with moral justifications of lifetime trespassing rights.

A hop, skip and high school career later, Asbury Angus still stands in Price possession. Divorces have a way of splintering all people and possessions involved, with the exception of at least one family-life remnant that neither party can bear to chalk up to collateral damage. It is usually a vestige that, when preserved, can attest to at least one small, albeit materially insignificant, success. Asbury Angus, with its churning hills, form-fitting fences, and combed fields, is a direct result of seventeen years with two lives cohabitating, coexisting, cogenerating. Sometimes the vestiges of divorce are the children; my parents' vestige is the farm. Even as I traverse the same grains of earth, cold and packed years later into winter's navel, I am not resentful to still be splintering. I would rather have the farm. The grass grays from a cold season's touch, but it reminds me of an aging foundation. The mud puddle pond, hazy with chunks of ice, taunts the tongues of newborn calves. Rows of barren brown limbs stand to attention, saluting the same eruptive sun, patiently waiting for it to bring forth spring life. I still trace that foundation with my feet, and it brings me forward. I march up the hill and know home.

La Hispaniola is just a handful of landmass among the Caribbean's archipelago. It houses Haitian and Dominican people. I travel there to hear them eat, taste their words, and observe their language. I yearn to be familiar with their Asbury Angus. I settle into a white van that seats nine with fourteen other Americans who are also part of my service-learning trip. Our driver spins us through city colors while occasionally plucking a building's faded pink or burnt orange into attention with the jolt of brakes. We approach a compound enclosed in white walls topped with curls of barbed wire. Their security guard, a tooth-speckled smiler, waves us through the

iron-dressed gates with his shotgun. I am peeling my sticky skin off the van seat as I squint into the approaching darkness.

We sit in the kind of shelter you typically hold your family reunion in. A chalkboard stands with importance at center. Its condition is laughable. My eyes frown as they peruse the webbed cracks and blue hue. Scan. Pause. Frown. Scan. Pause. Four white eyes stare to me. Two Haitian immigrants see me see them. I shove my glance downward and settle in my narrow wooden chair. Seven Haitian migrant workers occupy the front of the shelter like ambassadors. They begin to chatter with our professor, Felix.

Haitian skin is royal black. It holds the same authority as the black of night. Their slow Spanish and second language word choices make it easy for me to understand. Since Felix stands in as translator, he introduces us as the youth of future and importance. Their nonchalant attitude exudes judicious intellect; they remain unaffected until gathering truth from experience. They do not pay mind to our stated importance. One man has youthful wrinkles that flit across his face with sage and philosophical skepticism. A woman, braless and clothed only in black sweatpants and a washed-through blue t-shirt, demands attention with the strength in her voice. She speaks and marinated thought comes out. The letters of each word push forth from her tongue into the thickness of Dominican air, taking the shape of small font capital letters.

“What will they do with our lives after we hand them forth? What purpose do our words and dredged up suffering serve if only to be briefly entertained?”

She questions our intent. My cheeks flood with a heated red. Truthfully, we gave our parents’ dollars to this university program to get us first row seats to this lecture, a front row view of their

suffering. After all, this is the education and awareness that JMU promises to deliver its students. This is how the university churns out globally enlightened citizens. The onset of foolishness begins in the soles of my feet, working its way to tug the viscera in my abdomen down, down, down. The very concept of awareness blushes, and it is tumbling down through my mind.

“We are legal workers of the Dominican Republic. The police bash the heads of our kin with the butts of their discriminatory guns.”

But guns are meant for complete jobs, a trigger pull and done. They are used like an unsharpened knife here, to leave scars for remembering. Discrimination abounds.

“We educate our youth here because the government has revoked their citizenship.”

The government twists the blunt knife. Deprive a population of education and your racial slurs about stupidity will become true. Oppression abounds.

The Dominican Republic’s corrupt government passed “Resolution 12,” which revoked the citizenship of many Haitians. It lends credence to the Dominican intolerance of Haitians. Haiti will not accept people of Haitian descent who were born in the neighboring country just because they share the same royal skin and cultural history. Ten by ten, “Resolution 12” renders Dominican Haitians homeless, Asbury Angus-less.

I look up to the 25-watt light bulb hanging in a crevice of the shelter ceiling. Its steady buzz is an audible effort to shoo away the enveloping nighttime. This is the light that allows them to teach after sun down. I can’t see the chalkboard.

“People do not care how much you know, unless they know how much you care.”

Momma’s words grip me into a sympathetic expression. To care is a verb, an action. These Haitian migrant workers are birthwronged. My birthright is Asbury Angus. My mind works to

recall the difference between homeless and shelterless. My identity leans on my home. People are migrating from poverty, from desolation, from Haiti. They are bearing Dominican citizens who serve the economy through organizations that legally help them find jobs in the Dominican Republic. But they are “undocumented” because poverty stole their chance at a birth certificate. Their children are born here and denied citizenship. No community ownership, no healthcare, no education, no job opportunities. Nowhere to prove worth and earn dignity through the application of knowledge. No vote, no power. Oppression.

Without documentation, the police refuse to look at the proof of life, each breath, rising and falling throughout their chests and shoulders. No ID, no breath. Human rights are for humans. Is the condition of humanity dependent on the existence of a birth certificate? If so, then why do the officers with birth certificates bruise bodies like violent primates? The injustice hooks to the inside of my back and pulls angry breaths up through my clavicle. Particles of Dominican air stick together and I pull them in my mouth like cigar smoke. In my mind, I stomp up the hill of Asbury Angus. This time, when I shout at the top, it will be to my world. We stand on wobbly legs, rid ourselves of paper pesos into their needing hands, and circle up to end in prayer, Haitian-style. It is there that I began to whisper to God.

“Thank you for my Asbury Angus. Help me restore theirs.”

“Help me restore theirs.” In this particular spot in my progression of understanding. I was living in the tenets of an idea that I would later learn to be called the liberation theology. Gustavo Gutierrez, a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame who is known as the founder, writes about a principle understanding in his book *A Theology of Liberation*:

“In the final analysis, poverty means death: lack of food and housing, the inability to attend properly to health and education needs, the exploitation of workers, permanent unemployment, the lack of respect for one's human dignity, and unjust limitations placed on personal freedom in the areas of self-expression, politics, and religion.”

Mostly embedded in Christian practice, this theology interprets the teachings of Jesus to mean we must seek liberation from unjust economic, political and social conditions for all. What struck me was Dominican spatial instability born out of unjust political conditions. When not even a tin roof or cement floor can be counted on due to statelessness, a power deficit disrupts all meager and most tenacious effort that people could make on their own behalf. Even our imprisoned enjoy the right of rest and voice.

I returned from the Dominican Republic with renewed vigor to do *something*. I wanted so urgently to complete an action that would contribute to the restoration of those without a home, and I felt as though I came from a place of privilege that positioned me best. Although not entirely religious in nature, I felt that to not take on this responsibility was an irresponsible waste of my own birthrights. Due to my privileges, my class, and my comparative economic fortune, I was tasked with liberation.

I returned home and became sad. Explaining this newfound zest for human rights to people who had not shared my encounter with Dominican citizens of Haitian descent was like trying to show them how to fall in love. They could not grasp how the brevity of this scheduled study abroad lecture could impact me with such depth. An older guy in the military that I was dating at the time scolded me for organizing myself around any plan to donate my time and effort

to people outside of my home country. My own authority of experience shuddered in distance and spouted question marks.

This is not uncommon though, and biographer Tracy Kidder reveals his own similar moment in a conversation with Dr. Paul Farmer, a physician who volunteers much of his time to restore health to people in Haiti. In the airport, Kidder recalls the landscape and nature of Haiti while commenting that “it seems like another world.” Farmer told him that his “feeling has the disadvantage of being wrong,” and was met with hesitation by Kidder. In a succinct, pivotal and sarcastic manner, Dr. Farmer articulated the substance within exacting the liberation theology: “The polite thing to say would be, “You’re right. It’s a parallel universe. There really is no relation between the massive accumulation of wealth in one part of the world and abject misery in another” (218). With this understanding, Farmer considers the globe to be just one single place and then contemplates justice. As his biographer following and documenting Dr. Farmer in his service, Kidder is placed in a situation much like that of first-time service learners. He comments on how far removed he feels from his experience, both in distance and memory. Dr. Farmer then presents a place in thought that takes time to synthesize and contemplate after initial experience. In the year following my experience with the lecture referenced in my narrative, I took my natural urge to help and feathered out my understanding of the tenet of justice within the liberation theology. Reflecting with this material was coincidental, as the book *Mountains Beyond Mountains* was required reading for a major course unrelated to my Honors Program service learning coursework. Encountering this theology engaged my cognitive process to develop an understanding of spatial justice relative to the world as a single place, rather than self-contained fragments of land. Although seemingly intuitive, this concept is slippery and one

that is lost when an individual ponders the meaning of a global citizen with space and time dimensions. Establishing an irrefutable commonality between myself and the Dominican citizens before me was key to creating a solid foundation from which to continue my service learning. I describe my rationale for this foundation below.

Unfair distribution of wealth within a family to the point of individual despair is clearly unjust, as is the unfair distribution of wealth within a city to the point of individual despair, and maybe even within a country to the point of citizen despair. Does our perspective, then, become so blurred from the enormity of our globe that we do not count the unfair allocation of birthrights and resources across our continents to the point of suffering to be worth restorative action? With our growing interconnectivity comes a call for a matching conscience that sees the clearly unjust respective to the proportion in which we function. We must not operate with the inflation of individuals. Humans do not lose value in increased numbers. Because Dominican hands touch the sugar I purchase, I am fastened to that human in a manner made intimate by the connectivity of basic fellow human welfare.

I care
that the human behind the hands which cultivate my sugar
fares better than
what oppressive despair
does enable.

Chapter Two: Achieving Commodious Language

At about twelve years of age, I became lost in Belgium. I peered my way into a stand that served as a convenience store in the middle of a sidewalk while my parents bought water bottles. Too bold and privileged, I separated from my family to search for gum. Quickly, I realized the height and width the world possesses when you stand alone. I darted around makeshift aisles and flashed my face outside of the stand only long enough to check for family. It felt as though I was twirling without purpose in a gaping hole. Panicked, I asked a man working there if my parents purchased water from him. He responded in three languages before he arrived at English and eventually pointed me toward my searching mother. Enveloped by familiarity and safety once more, I looked back to the convenience stand man in awe of his language intelligence. On that day, I learned how smart people are. I learned that not all potential is self-evident or realized in vocation.

At age twenty, I waited alone by the the Colosseum in Rome for a tour of the catacombs. I reveled in the isolation that I once regarded as a gaping hole. I woke up in the hostel alone and ventured the city alone. I stood in a white sundress with a low, open back by the Colosseum exit, the initial meeting place that the tour company's website had designated. The decision to go on a tour had been all mine, and I was brimming with the kind of pride you feel when you're resting on the edge of a roof you've climbed. I bought yet another chocolate gelato while the Roman sun reddened my toes, and I waited. I spent time examining the very top of the ancient structure before me and thought of the circus animal cookies with the miniature lions; both looked to be composed of crumbs. A man named Singh emerged from the Italian framework before me to offer a folding chair in the shadow of his tent.

“Here, my lady, you could rest while you wait.”

I glanced to his table of items for sale that he temporarily abandoned and agreed to sit next to him. His hair was like short frayed silk crowning his head, and he struck up easy conversation with his segmented and enunciated accent.

“I belong to India. And where are you traveling from?”

“Oh, uhm, I am visiting from the states.”

“Ah, dear no. You travel from paradise.”

I forced the notion that I was born to privilege down to my reddened toes, willing them to blush for me. My panic response was to follow up with as many personal questions as possible. Singh only works in Rome during the summers and sells items to the Indian army in the winter. The business belongs to his family, and his two brothers handle its affairs in his absence. His tone was unassuming and his hand pointed toward the cloudless sky when he spoke of his family. Singh misses them greatly during his summers, but the extra money is necessary and the work is always there. He knows English, Spanish, Italian, a bit of French and his home language. My colosseum man sells books, postcards and magnets at the exit of a tourist attraction.

Both my convenience store man and colosseum man presented me with an argument. Through my interaction with them, they each attested to the almost commonplace practice of learning and using the languages of the people around them. Rather than explicitly stating this or verbally elaborating on the purpose, these men argued through personal example. Rhetorician Jim Corder wrote extensively about this concept that eventually became known as Corderian Rhetoric. He purports that we, as humans, are individual arguments. Our actions and choices augment our experiences to push us into the embodiment of an argument. Our narratives are the

personal and historical accumulation of those experiences, choices, and actions. In his essay “Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love” Corder lays out the connection clearly: “the narratives we tell (ourselves) create and define the worlds in which we hold our beliefs. Our narratives are the evidence we have of ourselves and of our convictions. Argument, then, is not something we *make* outside ourselves; argument is what we are.”

(Corder, 3)

The narrative that I retold above about my conversations is the story I tell myself about those men, and it creates and defines my belief in the importance they place on communication. Although they both could be said to participate in the tourist industry, which necessitates multilingual skills and ephemeral amiability, I did not partake in their usual commercial relationship. They took real time to learn my need or just a little about me as a person with the knowledge that I was nothing more than a passerby. Their communication skills and receptiveness demonstrated an intelligence and use of rhetoric that Corder also values.

He continues to explain that the meshing of conflicting narratives is to elicit components of ourselves, or our argument, in order to reinforce or make emendations to our narratives. The nature of rhetoric, then, is fairly natural and initially primitive because the main criteria are experience and communication. Rhetoric is not necessarily a human construct because we (it) exist naturally, and all sentient beings can lay claim to the practice. Although literacy and knowledge of other languages is helpful in engaging in global commodious language, those skills are rendered useless without the rhetoric of listening. This mechanism is a “fundamental aspect of Corderian rhetoric....[in which] the purpose of language study is to enlarge our understanding

of the human condition” (Jacovitch, 22). Enlarging our understanding inevitably leads us to expressions and iterations of truth that we disagree with. They remain truths, though, because they are somebody’s equal grasp on reality. Encountering these truths can lead to a retreat to the knowledge and language that comfort us in the way it reinforces our understanding; we seek confirmation bias. Corder labels the language we use to avoid clashing with other narratives, to avoid mending our own arguments, and to avoid engaging in the rhetoric of listening as “tribal talk” (32). This phrase means to delineate the language of closed community jargon from global commodious language.

Where, then, is global commodious language important? German sociologist and philosopher Jurgen Habermas uses his essay “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article” to unfold the public sphere as a “realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed” (Habermas et al, 49). This sphere, he purports, is guaranteed to all citizens and is separate from the political sphere where convention and tradition restrict and mold the way rational-critical discourse transpires. This type of communication exists when citizens experience and exercise “the freedom to express and publish their opinions—about matters of general interest (Habermas et al, 49). The physical locations where people participating in the public sphere engage in rational-critical discourse are known as discursive spaces. Jürgen Habermas begins his investigation with the discursive spaces in France, Germany and Britain in order to derive a set of criteria specific to the bourgeois public sphere. In his book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas unfolds the emergence of rational-critical discourse in public gathering places such as coffeehouses and salons. These discursive

spaces are conducive to public sphere criteria such as inclusion in so far as disregarding status as a determining factor for speaker ethos (36), and the rational-critical discourse that propels action based on the reflection and debate of relevant information.

My colosseum man used his place of commerce as a discursive space and entered into rational-critical discourse by sharing his story, the narrative of self. In this point of space and time connection, he argued that I came from paradise. I knew that my home country is not without major issues and that suffering is ever-present, but I did not clash my narrative with his. Much of what Corder discusses when he mentions the clashing of narratives is founded in psychological evidence. The concept of cognitive dissonance occurs in an individual when she holds two or more contradictory values. This dissonance occurs when we begin to respect and understand somebody (essentially an argument) who is pushing forth his or her personal conflicting narrative. My cognitive dissonance silenced me and provoked me into a succession of inquiry because I was unsure how to convey the injustice I felt existed in a place the world perceives to be pure opportunity and option. Moreover, I felt guilty for the sheltered view of dystopia that I was sure to have if this man regarded America as paradise.

Corder pushes beyond the idea that each individual is an argument, as expressed by each narrative and embodiment, through contending that the significance lies in the exchange. If cognitive dissonance and basic resistance to altering one's ideology to fit the fabric of another is a primary, yet plenary hurdle which subsumes initial effort to communicate, then we must find a bridge. Accounts of accepting another's humanity to change a mind fills our American film entertainment industry in works such as *The Blindside*, where a young black man is taken in and

then understood by a wealthy white family. The movie *Wild* is similar in its function, but it serves as the narrative for the audience to accept rather than for the audience to first view as being accepted by another. Our common culture is touched by these accounts and holds them up with some significance; we recognize the importance of Corderian rhetoric and express it in our Habermasian discursive spaces. However, we are touched in part by how novel and rare these accounts are, and we struggle to set aside bias and personal favor to engage in what we value. For this, Corder proposes seven different solutions that can be enacted alone or in harmony. They boil down to simple techniques one can use when approaching a conflicting narrative (Corder, 28-31)

- 1) Go alone (to avoid the group think of “tribal talk”)
- 2) Keep identity in sight, but do not be so attached to it that you cannot give it away
- 3) Abandon authoritative positions
- 4) Be open to invention and use common ground language
- 5) Study time and space
- 6) Allow the common language to maintain ethos
- 7) Pile the time of a realistic world back into discourse

Corder’s techniques, then, give a solid set of ways for all humans (or arguments) to embrace and handle cognitive dissonance in order to reach a commodious language. Although

Habermas defined the public sphere as accessible, he tells his readers that each age or generation easily slips into the assumption that accessible means without restriction. Conditions for being in certain discursive spaces and engaging in rational-critical discourse are education and property (Hauser, 72). During initial development, discursive spaces in the form of coffeehouses allowed a vast range of education levels to meet upon common cultural topics such as plays and pamphlets. As the meeting of minds and exchange of thoughts became commonplace, multiple public spheres would form, the sphere of the bourgeois being one in particular. A perceived hierarchy of importance was still present, as people inevitably recognize the levels of power according to wealth and historical family honor within a group. However, this space maintained Habermas's criteria of accessibility by lending equal voice to those of different power levels within the bourgeois. The individuals within this sphere were "educated and economically invested" who met to "exchange views on matters of public life and, thereby, to form public opinion that was to be taken seriously for shaping the ways in which these matters were disposed" (Hauser, 72). In the context of a democracy, the bourgeois grappled with rational-critical discourse that would control policy in the political sphere. Essentially, the power to govern stemmed from this public sphere.

Habermas detected a shift of power with the rise of capitalism. Public opinion was no longer formed and then given credence to shape policy, but rather it was sought out after official action was initiated by the state (Hauser, 73). The state acted as an individual would in defaulting to confirmation bias as a justification for behavior. The state, as essentially a large group of people, acted as people do, yet with much more influence. Elite public spheres rise from this by

providing a public opinion favorable to political agenda. The elite, or the few, then enable the state to give and to take rights. The taking of education and citizenship is what I watched in the Dominican Republic with my service-learning group. Our curriculum was not organized around their social issues, but rather just to travel, provide a service and learn. That freedom gave us the time of a realistic world to pile into our discourse with people there and to perceive the current social movements. Our service-learning reaction was far from standard and arguably telling.

Silence sometimes sounds like crumpled papier-mâché, as thin and tenuous as a coupon slip. It crumples around the classroom as my practicum group awaits the arrival of our professor. We are friends, but we do not speak; our minds are steeping in shame. We have returned from the Dominican Republic and completed both the service and the learning required from our Honors course. Our rushed journals reflect our synthesis rather than our journey, a consequence of procrastination. The syntheses, though, give us pause. Our initial service-learning trip tasked us with teaching English to schoolchildren who are part of Aldeas Infantiles SOS, a non-profit organization that provides support to children without parents. One of my journal entries recounts the difficulty of teaching in a Dominican school without materials. I add to the noise vacancy with eyes fixed upward. How do you learn without a pencil? I decide I would not be able to remember anything.

Within a gathering of people, silence signifies organization and cohesion of understanding. We saw the constraints a *funded* school faced and walked in the streets with teenagers selling shoddy souvenirs to support cardboard homes. Then we came back. Time and space are both equal human constructs, yet space trumps the empathy war. A homeless child does

not suffer in your space, but she does suffer in your time, as our breaths tick by. We briefly bought a trip to their space and exchanged it for our America, giving it back, letting time pass, taking with us our service and our learning.

Public sphere is also a human construct, where we find ideas in one another and build the standards of living conditions. Though somehow we etch firm lines in the sphere, silencing certain groups and creating “others” who we alienate from our working self-definitions. The “other” being the frame we hinge on to push against, acting as a door capable of shutting off opportunity. Spheres construct institutions, government bodies serving as systems of efficiency; a construct made of us who make lines. My first weeklong peek into the Dominican Republic also presented happy people, but later I would realize they are just individuals who collectively find harmony with smiling and suffering.

As an American enrolled in the service-learning track of my university Honors Program, I had plunged into Dominican public spheres and resurfaced back into my university and social spheres. I contended with the clash of guilt, hope, desperation and motivation as I struggled to launch out of the experiences and mindset I was entrenched in to form a view from the sky, a view that I could swoop down from to separate the bullies from the victims. Mistakenly, I thought my American public sphere would provide me with an eagle’s perspective. It was not until I subscribed to Corder’s first three techniques for approaching other narratives that I began to rise in understanding. I applied for a scholarship to go to the DR alone, I allowed my prior two weeks of experience there to lend me Dominican connectivity, and I took no pride in personal identity, as I am equipped equally with thought, body, and voice. With these three elements that

enable me to engage in rhetoric, I placed myself in Dominican space with the hope that intersecting narratives create a commodious language. In the time leading up to my visit, I prepared by leaning on history to explain the roots and building tensions that have manifested in their current events.

In this way, I moved from establishing commonality to searching for a method of interaction that would enable my understanding despite cultural and lingual differences. These degrees of separation are minor in comparison to eliminating the mindset that I am able to evaluate their circumstances from a place of first-world knowledge. To combat this, I found it helpful to place human significance on their history in a way that illuminates my inability to adopt the outlook of a Dominican in their culture without first spending time with somebody who can tell me exactly what that outlook entails. In other words, research is not sufficient and does not place me in a position of comprehensive knowledge. A step that was part of my service learning curriculum was to research Dominican history. The following chapter utilizes narrative to aid in placing human significance on history while ending with an understanding of current conditions in relation to global democracy, capitalism and international influence.

Chapter Three: Intersecting Context with Experience

In 1492, Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue and (re)found the ground green and the people brown. In honor of the Spanish crown, he claimed the land La Isla Espanol, later to be called Hispanola. Spanish chroniclers documented the Taino natives, who arrived and settled the island from Yucatan, Belize and Amazonia generations before. Their notable quality was tranquility, and conflicts amongst them were settled with a game called batey (Guitar, par 2). In place of battle, they played ball in a similar fashion to soccer in front of their political heads of state. The victor's wishes settled the argument. These people welcomed their newcomers and died from the diseases which second class citizens often suffer. Spanish maltreatment, enslavement and murder greatly reduced Taino numbers and capacity to defend their land or people.

Soft flame brushed along the grains of the timber Taino palace, painting it orange and smearing it with red. A row of fried fish decorated with corn, bell peppers, and salted squash lay untouched and bedded on yucca. The feast spanned the appetite of one hundred men and women; it was a celebration of welcome. Taino chieftess Anacoana gazed at the blood spilling from the remnants of her sister's arm onto the peanut-stuffed duck she had meticulously prepared and displayed for the diplomatic reception of the Spain's incoming governor for the new colony. Careful, concentrated fire had crisped the duck skin for a delicate crunch, but the blaze now engulfed the skin of her people. These people loved her, as she was the respected widow of chief Coanabo. With prideful wit, Spanish soldiers gathered Taino leadership in one wooden palace, like an inside-out Trojan horse set on fire. Spaniards requested this meal and she extended invitation to all Taino rulers, calling for a meeting of souls, a meeting of diverse global

intelligence. As a survivor of this attack, this image would consume Anacoana's vision when the new colonists would later hang her from a tree by her thin, suntanned neck. In the time a flame can creep and curl its destructive step, half of the global intelligence present that day was seared into the dirt like melting, hurting plastic.

This event would maim any chance of organized effort for the previous population to carry their culture and society forward. Time would only thread their genes into the incoming population to sustain a legacy of people with the memory of Taino mothers. Through a clash of monarchies, the island was split between Spanish and French rule, though monarchical grip on trade and governance became weak with disinterest and distraction, so the people who had mixed their bloods and skins succeeded the natives before them in resettling the island. French influence on Western aborigines and imported African slaves created the culture of Haiti, while Spanish influence in the mezcla children born from aborigine women created the Dominican culture. Rebellious Haiti claimed autonomy, breaking from France and would later take over Dominican land and people for 22 years. After much culture clash and resentment, a grassroots resistance named La Trinitaria rose to create enough conflict for the Haitian occupation to retreat, thusly establishing Republica Dominicana in 1844 (Guitar, par 17). America occupied the Dominican Republic for eight years, opening up US economic interests on the island, instating a different political system, and building up the Dominican army. America ended occupation, and the dictator Trujillo was able to move through the new political system and secure a dictatorship for a future that would make him a notoriously corrupt ruler.

The border separating Haitian land from Dominican land was crooked and malleable to the financial interest of any man. "Here!" A Dominican could claim, "Any Haitian selling goods

past this rock pays me a dividend.” “There!” A Haitian could claim, “I’ve moved the rock back to your land.” An argument could ensue and no truth could be found, but only constructed.

Trujillo devised a border agreement with the Haitian president, and international eyes looked fondly upon such progress. The next night, Trujillo would command the Dominican army to take machetes to the arms, legs and necks of Haitians who remained on Dominican soil. Little legs piled up on disputed soil, as they massacred even the children of people who had lived in the same spot for generations. Dominican born humans were disembodied for their Haitian ancestry and resolve to remain in their homes. The Parsley Massacre still cries out in current memory to chronicle the violent tension between cultures.

Trujillo’s eventual assassination led to the democratically selected Juan Bosch, who had a socialist vision for the DR. This prompted America to cash in its strong vote for a new president in what many view to be a predetermined election. Leader corruption and the impression of a puppet government left many political parties and the people without a sense of political efficacy through the 1990s (Guitar, par 37). Efficacy is the perception of power, and without perception, there is no effort. People change people’s perception, for better and for worse. The rooted perception of cultural conflict bleeds into cultural power dynamic construction. Power is often the right to be heard in social platforms, the right to engage in rational-critical discourse in discursive spaces. Steven Gregory, an associate professor of anthropology and African American studies at Columbia University wrote a book called *The Devil Behind The Mirror* about the impact of globalization in the DR. He points to the 1916-1924 US occupation as a specific time where discursive power was removed from the everyday Dominican and placed into the pockets of the increasingly foreign bourgeois class. Through Executive Order No. 511, the US created a

new system of land registration that enabled sugar corporations to legally expropriate peasant holdings for their use (Gregory, 21). Aside from taking the living and working lands of individuals, the sugar corporations took over land and disrupted the Dominican system of *terrenos comuneros*. An online Dominican dictionary first defines this as “premises or undivided land owned or said to belong to two or more people” (DRLeYes). The system of community land is one historically embedded in Dominican agricultural practices. The third definition of the land is “Terenos [do] not have certificates diplomas that protect their property rights” (DRLeYes). With the seizure of land that brought “peasant” working citizens together comes the seizure of critical discursive spaces where social ideas can form and then influence the policy that directs the way they live. This foreign policy shaped the cultural concept of community land in such a way that it now requires a definition that juxtaposes “undivided land” with a legal concept that points to lack of direct ownership as a justification for land removal.

After spending many months and concentrated time with people in Boca Chica, a tourist destination in the DR, he noted that “the politics of identity was inexorably fused with the everyday politics of making a living” (Gregory, 19). This is the antithesis of opportunity; indeed, this is chaining skin and status to potential. Throughout his work, Gregory references Karl Marx and the “unfreedom of ‘free labor’” under the system of capitalism in democracies. A free market that is unregulated by any government entity finds a way to regulate itself, often in a hierarchical structure that steepens the levels of capital separation. The capitalist labor process is composed of power relations and practices through which labor is subsumed by capital (Gregory, 19). This Marxist concept has a reality in the Dominican Republic. Labor was swallowed by the likely influx of capital in the promising tourist industry. Regarded as an “economic panacea,”

tourism took hold of Dominican land and people at the encouragement of the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the DR administration of President Joaquin Balaguer (Gregory, 23). The plan to rely on a service-based industry moved the country from a primary sector, which involves an economy dealing mainly with natural resources such as mining and agriculture. The next step, a secondary sector, is one that involves manufactured goods, also known as industrialization. Mass production of goods provides employment to the populations in the country's localities. However, tourism caters to the tertiary sector, which involves providing services. Logically, the secondary sector builds a working class that eventually accumulates the wealth to form a demand for services, moving them into the tertiary sector. By skipping over industrialization, the Dominican economy of services would only appeal to foreigners with the wealth. Additionally, the limited jobs provided by tourism only accentuated the already present discrimination between the people of the island. Many of the residents in Boca Chica recount that tourist-related firms would not hire *morenos*, or people with relatively dark skin, for jobs that allowed them to interact with tourists (Gregory, 26). This is an act of discrimination that crystallizes the ideological view which values light skinned minds over dark skinned minds, as if they had a critical difference. Gregory succinctly describes this practice: "The value and qualities of their labor were politically constructed through the iteration of social distinctions (among them, race, gender, sexuality, and citizenship)" (19). From this, he contends, an informal economy was born. This economy works within the tourism structure imposed upon the population. Dominicans began selling visitors goods such as handmade jewelry, fruits, clothing, and other crafts. The value of this labor is constructed through a gender distinction in that men are viewed as best fit to "conduct business," and so women are sidelined to domestic work and

so “these constructions of women’s roles and capacities also informed the discourses and practices of the police and other authorities” (Gregory 33). Women are less likely to obtain a work permit to provide a service such as that of a *motoconcho*, or motorcycle taxi (a popular type of public transportation in the DR), because of their construction of capacity. Capacity in this sense is not the extent to which a woman is capable of performing a task, but rather the extent to which she is slammed down with a glass ceiling constricting her movement in space and time. The lack of a permit would prompt the police to place her in jail, which alters her space and spends her time to a detriment. This is just one manifestation of forced capacity. Another is found in my Chapter One narrative concerning the lack of citizenship according to ancestry and skin color.

The elevation of the tourism was a parcel of the government’s neoliberalist economic theory which subscribes to the rationale that only an unregulated “free market” economy can achieve optimal economic growth, efficiency, technological process and distributional justice. The last portion, distributional justice, is achieved by allowing the people to construct the mechanisms of distributing wealth in place of government guidance or sanction. This would ensure the free movement of goods and services, however, the great impact of globalism allowed those goods to freely move internationally and did not necessitate the engagement of the general public, or the engagement of those who do most of the living on the island. This theory, then, led the government to drastically reduce the state’s role in providing social services and employment benefits in the 1980s and 1990s (Gregory, 28). Social services includes education, and I met a fierce advocate, of children’s education, Joanny, during my first trip to the DR. Joanny was working passionately and fervently in the 4% Movement which petitioned the government to allocate the full four percent of national GDP to funding education as was written in their

legislation. My professor had asked her to accompany us throughout the trip. Face-first, she greeted me. Her brilliant white teeth spoke hello amidst a gleaming smile. With bare features, Joanny looks like the truth. Standing no taller than 5'3", her presence rolls unassumingly through our large university group visiting Santo Domingo. With a slight language barrier, she assisted us in navigating the vital nuances of a foreign place. Our group had one guy and a flock of girls. Dominican men hissed and called at us as we would pass. Shocked, we looked to Joanny and saw her head tilted and right eyebrow raised to the black night sky. We followed her confidence and left the propositions unaddressed.

As a leader to me, I gravitated towards conversations with Joanny in our group meals together. As a friend, she invited me to stay with her in my third visit to the DR. As an active participant in the 4% movement and a former employee of an NGO called One Respe that focused on child protection and development, she gained attention for her writing and pedagogical research. She was eventually hired to work for an organization that resulted from the 4% Movement and petitioned the government to fund the opening of new schools that would provide primary education and care to young children. Now, Joanny works for the office of the President, pursuing protection for Dominican children and mothers regardless of ancestry. In November of 2015, she gave a public talk about the tension between Dominicans and Haitians. She said, "Racism and anti-Haitianism hurt me, too, as a Dominican. They don't allow me to acknowledge and embrace the rich African heritage that we Dominicans have" (Culsar, par 5). My personal encounter, my connection, with Joanny and her resolve to deliver human rights prompted my research and continued interest to build myself as a service-learner. On her first visit to JMU, I contacted the coordinator of her schedule and begged for a sliver of Joanny's

time. We met in Starbucks, and I told her of the astonishing fact I had learned about education in her country. Reading out of my notebook fraught with ink, toil, realization and worry, I told her that “by 1990, real capital expenditures in education were equal to only forty-five percent of what they had been in 1980” (Gregory, 28). Paragraphs kept forming in my throat and lodged out with excitement about the daycare that she was building for her community in her mother’s backyard. I paused for just one moment, for just one clarification. I asked, “This daycare will accept Dominican children *and* those with Haitian descent, right?” Suppressing a wise half-smile with whole sincerity, Joanny looked to me. “They are all the same, dear.”

The skin on my face prickled with color, and the embarrassment undulated over and under my ribs, levitating me in my chair; this chair felt the same as my splintery Haitian’s lecture chair and my Colosseum man’s merchant chair. I had been here three times before, in this chair of realization and exit from naivety. The third time had been in a plush seat on a ride back from being a tourist, and I carry this experience with me every place I go.

Dust-sprinkled cracks aged the face of the boy on the median who I was studying from afar. Truthfully, we were only a few feet apart. I was on a bus on the way back from a tourist excursion full of island beach, cheap massages and a catamaran ride. He was just outside of my window while our driver shouted at the frozen traffic ahead. To me, the foreign land and culture made him look far away as I stared to synthesize the void in his face where expression normally lives. He gazed onward, looking through our tire resting directly in front of him. With drooping lashes and a caved abdomen, his breaths lightly rocked his shoulders in a rhythm to and fro. He pursed his lips and redirected his gaze. Quickly and directly, dark irises pierced my stare and his eyebrows angrily pulled toward each other, creating disapproving crinkles between them.

Caught, I flashed him a timid smile. He pulled his index finger horizontally across his throat, killing my stare. Extending his legs to stand, he began to shake his head and shifted his spine to my face. I felt hurt, until I saw that his disgust for me matched the proportion of his condition. He clamored onto the median railing while his skeleton pressed against his dark skin. My median boy was so hungry.

Today, I look back to my median boy and ask, “Have I robbed you?” In my uncaring economics or lack of real effort to find you and listen to your silence or your anger, have I robbed you of the kind of existence I experience? And so with this question and understanding of La Hispanola, I was drawn to the DR once more to stay with Joanny. On the third day of my visit, she returned to her house from a meeting with the president’s council. She was brimming with emotion as she told me that the government officially adopted her group as an agency in place of a contracted service, which ensures support and sustainability for their mission. On that same day, she brought me to the opening of a new daycare and preschool in Navarrete. She spent one and a half years planning for this, but she spent over fifteen years working towards it. I watched her watch her vision as it had materialized before her. Joanny traced her feet around the balcony on the second level, feeling the tangible strength of construction, the strength of her efforts. I do not remember that moment for the excitement or bubbling joy; I just remember a very content Joanny. The employees of the new institution were decorating to welcome the families in the community. The families, though, were already there standing on chairs to hang streamers or filling their cheeks with air to blow up bright balloons. We looked to them as they prepared for their own welcome party; they took so much pride and ownership in this place. Here, they gathered in safety and purpose with dialogue and collaboration. This was their

discursive space, this was their power source. Tracy Kidder wrote about the multiple purposes of building of schools in Haiti: “The establishment of a school may seem a bit out of place given the homelessness, landlessness, and hunger...But it appears that they themselves did not feel that way. Children flocked to the new facility. One peasant women explained, ‘A lot of us wondered what would have happened if we had known how to write. If we had known how to write, perhaps we wouldn’t be in this situation now’” (91). A Brazilian man once contemplated this very situation. As an educator and philosopher, Paulo Freire taught among the poor and illiterate individuals in his home country. Growing up with hunger and lack of resources, he gained critical insight to the pedagogical practices of educating the poor. He explains that in the action of service, “we must never merely discourse on the present situation, must never provide people with programs which have little or nothing to do with their own preoccupations, doubts, hopes, and fears...” (Freire, 85). At the opening of a new preschool in Navarrete, every person was handed either a water bottle or a juice box along with some sweet bread. Hungry and tired from a long day, I was so thankful for the encounter with rejuvenation, and I wanted to tell them I had barely had the chance to eat all day so that I could demonstrate my appreciation. Then, I thought, how many others would agree with me not for the lack of time but for the lack of food? Tracy Kidder expanded on the reason for education in Haiti by stating that, “a school could serve as a place for teaching lessons about health and for providing free meals to malnourished children without injury to their dignity. To build a school was to unite the practical and the moral” (91). To unite the practical and the moral is to create a building that serves a community purpose and addresses the preoccupations, doubts, hopes and fears of the people. In the stairwell painted

yellow, Joanny told me that this place would restore the dignity of her people, and I teared up with the knowledge that she excluded no person from the definition of her people.

Chapter Four: Service through Social Capital

A democracy, as any government structure, is subject to a degree of malleability as both the population and territory it governs grows. Robert Putnam, political scientist and professor of public policy at Harvard University, inspects the public sphere and social capital transformations across the recent and historical development of democratic structures in five different countries (Great Britain, US, France, Sweden, Australia). In *Democracies In Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society*, Putnam's analysis reveals the stages of social capital distribution as a democracy ages. He defines social capital as "social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity" (8). Engaging in a service learning program entrenched me in the process of constructing social capital. I set out on my first trip with a group of colleagues and the intention of teaching English. I thought I was going to deliver a kind of inaccessible knowledge that would inspire and enable the children of the DR. My professor, Felix Wang, had given us very little preparation time, but we trusted in the structure he was providing for us. We were given no real itinerary or cursory explanation of what would compose our day to day activities. On the first day in the school, I was rushed with the love and admiration of children who had not even learned my name. They clung to my fingers and asked me questions about my favorites. "Tienes un gato? Tienes un novio?" Giggles rippled in a girlish chorus when they questioned my love life. "Do *you* have a cat?" "Do *you* have a boyfriend?" I repeated. Just like that, they internalized the words dog and boyfriend.

In a frenzy, I made my way to a classroom with my partner and my materials. Busy with arranging the room, I turned my attention to the desks to find sixteen sets of eyes staring, listening. In the hour and a half of time we had with them, our lesson plan lasted about thirty

minutes. Left to improvise, we drew pictures, played Simon Says, sang songs, drew more pictures and danced. During recess, I did gymnastics with the boys who could do backflips and we gained an audience of more than fifty squirming, squealing laughs and clapping hands. Groups of girls showed me how to dance to bachata, a genre of sound and beat original to the Dominican Republic. At the end of the day, I felt like a failure. We had taken precious time away from their teachers and could not even come prepared with adequate lesson plans. We morphed our guilt into irritation with Felix. How could he have allowed us to fall so flat? In our reflection time, we expressed the need to access wifi and organize better lesson plans. We said we needed to create structure.

What I have come to realize is that we were already creating social capital. Before we could be humans *for* humans, we needed to be humans *with* humans. Our professor required us to journal daily. Below is my entry for the sixth day.

Day 6: Remember Me

We painted a mural of the Duke dog on the side of one of the school walls today. A lot of children asked me why we were painting and I told them it was so that they would always remember us. We had a short time to sit together as a [JMU] group and talk about our favorite kids and how they loved to interact with us. I had a group of fifth grade girls ask me if I would come to their classroom to teach them English. They didn't know it, but I was more excited to have been invited into their classroom than they were to have me there. Just having their attention and seeing how quickly they write down the English words that I put on the board makes me feel honored to be there. They didn't care how prepared or unprepared that we were. They only cared that we were there.

Right before we left, I explained our painting once more to a little boy. He gave me a quizzical look and responded,

“Por supuesto, nunca te olvidaremos.” “Of course, we will never forget you.”

And I will never forget him.

This social capital connection has real world implications. In fact, studies have found that “economic development under some circumstances can be boosted by adequate stocks of social capital” while US and UK research found “that social networks, both formal and informal, reduce crime” (Putnam, 6). Our visit provided a reason for connection that carried throughout the children as well. We shattered normal social circles by rearranging children and valuing them equally. Although, out of human nature, some of us chose favorites who we could tell were unpopular with their peers. They received new attention and were plunged into dialogical situations where they were heard and given new value in their Habermasian lifeworld. Joanny helped to coordinate our time at the school, and based on her discussion about the importance of valuing her own, shared African heritage, she knew how to cultivate a situation to which Freire would give a nod of affirmation. On the topic of globalism and our international collaboration, Freire wrote, “Narratives of liberation must not ignore the cultural particularism of their roots, yet at the same time they must not abandon the opportunity to coordinate on a global basis” (McLaren and Leonard, xi). With the touch of another continent, Joanny and Felix arranged an avenue for the children with Dominican roots and the children of Haitian roots to group themselves together with us serving as the “other.” Furthermore, Felix delivered us purposed disorganization to enable the natural process of developing social capital. He placed us among Dominicans without allowing us to come from a place where we already knew anything

about them. In this way, he eliminated our missionary zeal from our service-learning mindset and knocked us to a place of searching for a spatial understanding. We saw streets littered with the trash of thousands and roads that could not be roads for the holes they had in them. This is something, I thought, that needed to be addressed. To get past these initial differences, though, allows me to find the significance in the birthrights they are asking for. Poor infrastructure and trash-filled cities is the space that have shaped Dominicans and although it is a different space than the one that has shaped me, it serves its people well. I cannot impose my spatial knowledge and expect to glean meaningful understanding. The hunger and want for self-understanding through reading and writing are underneath a cursory glance, but on the surface of one walk with a Dominican.

Dr. Paul Farmer believed in the liberation theology, which encourages people to help others overcome unjust economic, political and social conditions. The new leader of Catholicism, Pope Francis, also holds capitalism accountable for a general sense of indifference citizens embrace about suffering: “This imbalance is the result of ideologies that defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation” (par 4, Evans-Pritchard). Dr. Farmer talked about an internal ambivalence that provoked him into behavior to help victims of the current gross uneven distribution of wealth across our globe. He references a “psychic discomfort” that motivates him to go to medical school and deliver free services to those who cannot afford them in the world we have created (24). As globalism increases, so does the validity behind Tracy Kidders words “in the world we have created.” Through Felix, the service-learning program at JMU taught me the patience in listening and allowing others to define themselves with you. The empathy I develop from those definitions cultivate a psychic

discomfort that motivates me to reach out, keep working, and keep listening. During my most recent trip, I listened to silence and heard the echo of myself.

This Dominican woman is sitting on top of me in the car. She looks out of the window to the right with her knees forced in the metal rods supporting the front passenger seat behind its flimsy seat cover. The core of my right thigh remains tense. It trembles and pulls together to support her weight as I stretch my neck left, looking at the other window and trying to maintain personal space with my vision. I am using the DR's public transportation system and there are seven people in this five-seat vehicle. We don't fit in here and yet somehow our bodies conform like Tetris pieces and jolt together as one shape with the heavy touch of the gas pedal. This informal and local transportation is called the PA system, and it is specific to the cities of Santo Domingo and Santiago. The cars run up and down the same highway with tattered, peeling numbers displayed on their sides. You catch a ride by standing in the median or side of a four-lane highway and holding up enough fingers to indicate the number of passengers with you. We look like hitchhikers to foreigners. I've been here long enough to feel like more of a hitchhiker than a foreigner.

*Having finally accepted the woman on my lap as part of my temporary environment, I move my eyesight from the window to the car ceiling to give my neck a different angle. The woman has on a black pants suit with bright, bulky purse crammed in front of her torso. It is midday so I assume she is on a lunch break in the city. She is what the Aldeas Infantiles children call a professional (*proh-fess-si-on-al*). I want to ask her what a professional does in the workplace, but I would be speaking to her stiff hair that is wound into a small bun with little glitter clips around it. She is so close to me and I cannot access any knowledge about her; we are*

functioning as a transnational Tetris piece that fits together in geography yet acts irrelevant to each other's existence. In this moment, we are a microcosm of our globe. The PA car sways us to the right with a swerve to the curb and she exits.

My lap feels empty but I don't miss her. As a US citizen, I am accustomed to readjusting my vision to maintain spatial quality in my life. I do not see how my purchases affect the countries in my global lap even as I make them.

When we ask ourselves what a service learner looks like, we often think of people who build homes, teach in schools or provide medicine to a community in need. I contend, though, that those are often only people who provide a service. Setting up mission-like projects that bring in an outside group to complete a task in a short span of time often values service for its tangible product. This commodification of service excludes the value of working with people not to create a final product, but to create a community that is better positioned to envision and realize bigger, more useful products. In his Ted Talk, "Everyone Around You Has a Story the World Needs to Hear," Dave Isay recounts a time when he wrote a documentary on men living in Manhattan flop houses. After showing one man his page in the book, he grabbed the book and ran down the hall, shouting "I EXIST! I exist." Isay is the founder of StoryCorps, which is a project that documents life and history through personal interviews. He stated he could repeatedly see how "the simple act of being interviewed could mean so much to people, particularly those who had been told their stories didn't matter." The ones who have been told or shown that their stories do not matter are often those without birthrights. The principles in Corderian rhetoric assert that if we say their narratives do not matter, then we are saying their lives do not matter. An individual without

enough food to satisfy hunger or a designated shelter to provide protection often just wants to first be listened to, to be validated and held up by another human. It is in this moment of building power that we begin patterns of securing birthrights perpetuated by both a service learner *and* the population needing service.

Dave Isay stated that he could “literally see people’s backs straighten as they started to speak in the microphone.” Restoring those without rights the confidence to fight and maintain their rights is important work, and it is the work of a service learner. We do this through establishing social capital, through listening to others, through asking questions, through sharing interests, and through time. In the community we create with this work, we can identify the roots of many problems and collaborate to reach creative solutions. Gary Haugen, a former human rights attorney for the U.S Department of Justice, demonstrated this service learning method by spending time with a girl named Griselda and her family in Guatemala. In addressing the poor literacy rates in the community, he went to understand the cause. Instead of pouring money and resources into supplying books for nearby schools or investing in education for local teachers, he sat down with Griselda to talk. He learned that she, among many other females in her community, did not attend school because they could not get there without the threat of rape and abuse (Haugen). As the founder of the International Justice Mission, a nonprofit organization to protect those in poverty from violence, Gary Haugen provides us with an example of how the understanding that service learning programs help to cultivate can manifest in meaningful ways.

Today, I will meet with a ten year old Puerto Rican boy named Louis. He is new to my community, but my service learning experience has prepared me to listen to him in a way that will give him confidence to participate with his peers and embrace his education. Just the other

day, he told me that I am one of his two best friends, and I keep a picture he drew for me in my backpack. When I help him with English, color in his drawings and watch his favorite tv shows, I am learning and he is growing. My time in the Dominican Republic has been a catalyst, and I continue to extend my process of service learning through my life. I will not build him a house, but I will help to build him.

Bibliography

Corder, Jim W., and James S. Baumlín. *Selected Essays of Jim W. Corder: Pursuing the*

Personal in Scholarship, Teaching, and Writing. Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 2004. Web.

"DRLeyes | Diccionario | Terrenos Comuneros." *DR*

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 30th Anniversary ed. New York: Continuum, 2000.

Print.

Gregory, Steven. *The Devil behind the Mirror: Globalization and Politics in the Dominican*

Republic. Berkeley: U of California, 2007. Print.

Gutierrez, Gustavo. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*. Maryknoll, N.Y.:

Orbis, 1973. Web.

Haugen, Gary. "The Hidden Reasons for Poverty the World Need to Address Now." Ted 2015.

TED. Mar. 2015. Lecture. <https://www.ted.com/talks/>

[gary_haugen_the_hidden_reason_for_poverty_the_world_needs_to_address_now](https://www.ted.com/talks/gary_haugen_the_hidden_reason_for_poverty_the_world_needs_to_address_now)

Habermas, Ju. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category*

of Bourgeois Society. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1989. Web.

Habermas, Ju, Sarah Lennox, and Frank Lennox. "New German Critique." *The Public Sphere:*

An Encyclopedia Article. Vol. No. 3. Duke UP, 1974. 49-55.

Isay, Dave. "Everyone Around You Has a Story the World Needs to Hear." Ted 2015. TED.

Mar. 2015. Lecture. <https://www.ted.com/talks/>

[dave_isay_everyone_around_you_has_a_story_the_world_needs_to_hear](https://www.ted.com/talks/dave_isay_everyone_around_you_has_a_story_the_world_needs_to_hear)

Jacovitch, Jennifer. *On Living and Dying in Rhetoric: An Analysis of the Writings of Jim W.*

Corder. U of Arizona., 2010. Web.

Kidder, Tracy. *Mountains beyond Mountains*. New York: Random House, 2003. Print.

McLaren, Peter and Peter Leonard, eds. *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*. London: Routledge,

1993.

Putnam, Robert D. *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary*

Society. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002.