CHAPTER 9

Hopeful Engagement: The Sentimental Education of University-Sponsored Service Learning

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Introduction

The arrival and widespread adoption of service learning, an educational philosophy with roots in progressivism and pragmatism,[1] is easily among the most significant developments in American higher education over the last 20 years. In a foundational definition, service learning joins practical service work with traditional pedagogical models to create "a form of experiential education [requiring reflection and reciprocity] in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development" (Jacoby, 1996, 5). The expansion of the service-learning model reflects the growing influence of what has been termed, following Ernest Boyer, a "scholarship of engagement" (Boyer, 1990; cf. Butin, 2006). As service-learning programs and centers have proliferated across the landscape of higher education—from liberal arts colleges and universities to professional accreditation programs and trade schools—research on

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the implementation, institutionalization, and impact of service learning has become an important area of investment for scholars in education, psychology, and public policy. Perhaps not surprisingly, this research tends to be both quantitative in nature and conducted at a high degree of abstraction. Many scholars are (justifiably) invested in measuring outcomes of service learning in order to prove the pedagogical worth of service learning and to design more effective programs (Butin, 2005, 2010; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Jacoby, 1996). Research designed with these goals in mind tends to rely on survey data to document general trends, a methodological choice that necessarily constrains both the researchers' ability to perceive nuance and the survey respondents' capacity to express it in the first place.

While not discounting the value of this type of research, it is remarkable that there have been so few examples of alternative approaches to the study of student experiences and outcomes in higher education, particularly in the context of service learning. One notable exception to this rule is a recent study by Russell L. Carson and Elizabeth Domangue (2013), in which the authors adopt Robert Coles' (1993) terminology of emotional "satisfactions" and "hazards" in service learning in order to analyze the role of "emotion" in student experiences of participation in a hurricane relief program. Significantly, Carson and Domangue rely exclusively on qualitative data collected through various means, including written reflections, informal conversations, and open-ended interviews. The authors depart from dominant trends in research on service learning by prioritizing student experiences (as they were subjectively lived and felt) over abstract and measurable "outcomes." Moreover, in adapting Coles' language of "hazards" or negative affects activated during service, the authors demonstrate their commitment to honoring students' varied and often ambivalent experiences in service.

As a cultural anthropologist, I am admittedly partial to accounts that dwell in such ambiguity, valuing the irreducible expressive power of words and speech. Building on Carson and Domangue, I want to suggest that we need even more qualitative research on the subjective experience of being a student in service. The widespread adoption of service-learning programs across the landscape of higher education institutions, and service learning's growing acceptance as a pillar of American pedagogy, suggest that this model is a legitimate cultural artifact of our times, quite deserving of critical reflection. In particular, anthropologists ought to take service learning seriously not only as a site that condenses particular institutional and social values, but also as a system designed to produce a certain kind of subject: the engaged scholar, the student *qua* global citizen (cf. Foucault, 1980; cf. Mahmood, 2005).

My objective here is not to assess the feasibility or impact of service learning, nor to critique its normative assumptions about the types of students suited to this task, or indeed to reveal and comment upon its underlying universalizing motives. This is work that others, particularly scholars of education, have ably done (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, 2000; Butin, 2006). Rather, I propose to examine how a particular university-sponsored service-learning program has taken root within a wider institutional culture, and how it in turn shapes students as the hopeful and engaged subjects of service. I do this through an analysis of Duke University's flagship non-credit-bearing global service-learning program DukeEngage, which in the eight years since its inception has surpassed sports to become one of the leading reasons cited by prospective students when asked to explain why they applied to Duke.

While DukeEngage is just one among a proliferating number of university-sponsored global outreach programs, it is perhaps unusual in its twin ambitions to resignify the meaning of a Duke education and to reform undergraduate student culture through immersive service and civic engagement. By focusing on the aspirations and experiences of undergraduate students involved in a DukeEngage program based in West Africa, a program in which I participated in the role of site coordinator and program assistant,[2] I hope to make a case for paying attention to the physical, affective, and intersubjective experiences of service—dynamics which, however real and gripping, are routinely glossed over in program brochures, endorsements, and student evaluations. I argue that while DukeEngage forms students as service learners by providing a structured setting in which to deploy their "capacity to aspire" (Appadurai, 2013), it does not prioritize giving students a nuanced language through which to conceptualize and describe their experiences. In this way, the program implicitly values students' capacity to aspire at the expense of what might be called their *capacity to relate*.

Higher education institutions often demonstrate their commitment to values such as critical thinking and lifelong learning through their curricular programming. But as purveyors of service learning, universities have a unique responsibility to form students whose intellectual curiosity is enhanced by empathy and self-awareness. In failing to provide the guidance and support that allow students to reflect on their experiences critically—which at least in part means fostering a culture that celebrates (and publicizes) the valleys as much as the peaks—universities do a disservice to their charges, hindering their emotional and intellectual development. This essay aims not only

to show what service learning does (and sometimes fails to do), but also to suggest how anthropology might take a more active role in advocating new forms of "engagement" that prioritize relationality over insulated investments in the entrepreneurial self. While anthropology is already well positioned to illuminate how service learning functions as an institutionalized culture and mode of engagement, anthropologists should also take heed of the institutional cultures and programs in which we ourselves participate, as advisors, program directors, liaisons, or coordinators. Thinking critically about our own roles as leaders and educators in these areas, we might more ably support students as they learn to engage—and aspire—relationally.

DukeEngage and the Ascendance of "Global" Education

DukeEngage was born in the midst of difficult institutional circumstances. Conceived in 2006 at a Big Ideas conference hosted by then-Provost Peter Lange, the program came into being as the University was dealing publicly with a scandal of legendary proportions. In March 2006, a young black woman—who was a Durham area resident but not a Duke University student—accused members of the Duke men's Lacrosse team of raping her at a team party for which she was hired as a stripper. The resulting Duke Lacrosse case, which ended in the Lacrosse players' acquittal and the high profile disbarment of North Carolina district attorney Mike Nifong, brought infamy to Duke and further amplified racial tension and distrust between the University and the surrounding community of Durham.

DukeEngage arrived on the heels of this public scandal. Given the public relations crisis in which the University found itself embroiled, the successful launch of DukeEngage fulfilled an institutional need for redemption. Launched in the summer of 2007, DukeEngage was backed by $30 million in contributions from the Duke Endowment and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. It quickly garnered public attention, becoming the defining feature of Duke's undergraduate education less than ten years into its operation. Since its inception, DukeEngage has funded more than 3200 undergraduates volunteering both domestically and internationally, on trips to 69 countries located in every continent but Antarctica.[3] Current University President Richard Broadhead proudly invoked this legacy during a DukeEngage pre-departure orientation hosted at the Durham Convention Center in 2013. Speaking to a group of several hundred undergraduate students and faculty advisers picking at

the remains of their continental breakfast, he commented proudly that this was the first year more college applicants cited DukeEngage over Duke Basketball as a reason for applying to the school. The audience, clearly a sympathetic cross-section of the campus, erupted in applause.

While it is significant that DukeEngage took off in the immediate wake of the Duke Lacrosse case, the creative energies that gave birth to the program were already in motion as early as 2001. At that time, Duke had embarked on an intensive planning process with the ambition of repositioning the University as a leader in American higher education with emphases on interdisciplinarity, ethical inquiry, and cutting-edge research. The resultant plans, *Building Excellence* (2001) and its successor *Making a Difference* (2006), advertise the administration's interest in continuing to invest in areas of perceived strength that distinguish the University from other leading institutions. In particular, *Making a Difference*, which appeared in September 2006, expresses desires to "improve campus culture" and foster a "commitment to making a difference in the world" among undergraduates, goals that must have seemed all the more pressing and relevant given the events of that spring (Duke University, 2006). With its emphasis on inquiry motivated by "humility, respect, and curiosity" and a desire to understand "how global inequalities shape our world," DukeEngage set itself the task of remaking Duke's undergraduate culture from the inside out.

This ambition to hone Duke's image and its institutional culture through strategic programming investments is echoed in the 2017 DukeEngage Strategic Plan entitled, *A Blueprint for Deeper and Broader Engagement*. In snappy language that suggests the influence of an ad consultant, the *Blueprint* hails Duke's emergence as a signature purveyor of global outreach programs:

> DukeEngage is, in many ways, a reflection of the most important qualities of Duke, which only a generation ago was a highly regarded regional University and now is a major presence in global higher education. Bold, experimental and nimble, Duke has embraced initiatives that might be eschewed by more tradition bound institutions. It is just this mind-set of ambition with purpose—this culture of bold thinking—that enabled Duke to create DukeEngage, a civic engagement program that stands out for its magnitude and global reach. And to the extent that DukeEngage embodies three of the most important core strategic values of the University—globalization, interdisciplinarity and knowledge in the service of society—DukeEngage could probably only exist here at Duke. (Duke University, 2012)

DukeEngage is thus celebrated as the cornerstone of a new university culture, one characterized by a "mind-set of ambition with purpose" that sets Duke apart from its peers. Of course, DukeEngage is only one piece in the university's larger plan to globalize itself. In August 2014, the joint venture Duke-Kunshan University welcomed its first students after protracted negotiations with the Chinese Ministry of Education. Duke's success in this niche market of global education and service learning, taken with its massive investments in a new global campus, might be seen as an atonement for—even a disavowal of—the University's recent trials. Wittingly or not, this revamped global face defined by service (via DukeEngage) and enterprising partnerships (via Duke-Kunshan University), has effectively redeemed Duke's undergraduate program from the negative press of the Lacrosse scandal.

While DukeEngage has grown tremendously over the past ten years, it appears to have done little in the way of self-auditing (cf. Redfield, 2013), and has raised few questions in its voluminous self-promotion materials about the value and meaning of undergraduate service, and the precise nature of students' experiences in the program. Instead, the positive value of service is assumed, while the program website highlights students' uniformly upbeat reviews. Students can be heard speaking about DukeEngage in enthusiastic yet banal terms as being "amazing"—"a special opportunity" that can "change you and you entire Duke experience." While it would be naïve to expect the program *not* to advertise itself in the most flattering light, it is equally misguided to take a few students' solicited sound bites as the final word on the meaning and value of service. Anthropologically speaking, what seem more interesting are the embodied hopes, frustrations, and anxieties that are inevitably produced in the context of service learning, a paradigmatic encounter of self and other in an increasingly globalized, neoliberal world. Attending to students' experiences in service-learning programs is not the same as assessing the means and ends of service, although these deserve critical reflection as well. Rather, the former requires asking, what does it mean when we do service, how do we learn to conceptualize and speak about our experiences, and with what effects? I will return to these questions in a later section, but move now to a closer consideration of the ways service learning has become institutionalized in the context of neoliberal higher education, focusing in particular on its emergence as a specifically managed form of sentimentality and engagement with the other.

The Neoliberal Sentimentality of Service

Education researcher Dan Butin has argued that the institutionalization of service learning is hobbled by practitioners' attempts to make this pedagogical model appear principled yet politically neutral, and accessible yet distinguishing. The meteoric rise of service learning, Butin notes, is conditional on a double disavowal: proponents of service learning consistently downplay the model's underlying liberal ideology and the implicit normative assumptions it makes about the identity of "ideal type" service learners (white, middle-class, liberal arts students) (Butin, 2006, 481; cf. Butin, 2003). Following scholarship on neoliberalism, the retreat of the welfare state, and the age of affective labor (Harvey, 2007; Muehlebach, 2012; Ong, 2006), anthropologists studying the global university have instead emphasized the production of space within a neoliberal geography, the forms of relationality presupposed by global education, and the fashioning of students as global citizens.

In a recent article on the reconfiguration of area studies in the age of the global university, anthropologist Tom Looser describes the neoliberal global geography as aspiring to "create a world in which the outside doesn't matter…[through] differentiation without real difference" (Looser, 2012, pp. 112–113). Significantly, DukeEngage appears to embrace a similar philosophy positioning standardization as a measure of quality. In a welcome speech at a DukeEngage pre-departure orientation, one of the founding DukeEngage program administrators—an esteemed dean and education researcher—explained the success of the program's service model by comparing it to a McDonald's franchise. The goal, the dean explained, was to make DukeEngage a recognizable and dependable name for service throughout the world. There would certainly be local variations—indeed, not all Big Macs taste quite the same—but this was precisely the point. As a global franchise of immersive service learning, DukeEngage could promise undergraduate students an equivalent experience whether they traveled to Detroit or South Korea. An article in the local newspaper advertised the latest additions to the DukeEngage offerings this way:

> Next summer, Duke undergraduates can travel to the demilitarized zone between North Korea and South Korea. They can explore the entrepreneurship of Motor City [*sic*] or the multi-ethnic community of Miami Beach, or

> immerse themselves in the political climate of post-conflict Serbia. (Dudash, 2013)

The unordered sequence of destinations in this announcement effectively establishes South Korea and Detroit, Miami and Serbia as undifferentiated locations of equal interest and value. To paraphrase Looser, this underspecified enthusiasm exemplifies differentiation without real difference within the sentimental geography of global service learning. If the experience of service in these places is truly interchangeable, then what does this say about the kinds of relationships students are expected to form with the people whom they are meant to serve?

Looser also examines this question of relationality from the standpoint of neoliberalism. For Looser, "neoliberalism implies freedom from responsibility; especially, it implies freedom from responsibility to any kind of alterity, in favor of responsibility only to one's self. Logically, carried out as a principle, the result would be a kind of pure self-identity, free of relation to others" (Looser, 2012, p. 99). If the self's freedom from obligation to the other is a hallmark of neoliberalism, this particular withdrawal appears to be intensifying precisely as the university expands its reach beyond the American campus. Looser is deeply skeptical about the anti-relationality produced within neoliberalism. Freedom from relationality "might already sound like a possible vision of both freedom and autonomy," he writes, "but as a model for either community, or for individual identity, it is at the very least strange; what would it mean to have a self that finds identity without relation to any other?" (Looser, 2012, p. 99). But something stranger still appears to be going on when one considers the confluence of larger trends. How could an inward-looking ethos of personal accountability and individual autonomy become predominate in the age of global service? Have theorists of neoliberalism got it all wrong?

Although it may seem paradoxical, the age of global service is in fact wholly compatible with—even enabled by—the economic, political, and affective structures commonly identified as "neoliberalism." The leading characteristics of the neoliberal Zeitgeist—both the withdrawal from social obligation and the elevation of the entrepreneurial self—do not contradict the aims of contemporary global service. In fact, these qualities serve to define the limits of safe and effective connection in a world that privileges autonomy over interdependence. Specifically, neoliberalism authorizes relationality on the condition that connections be

freely chosen by self-authoring subjects; that they remain temporary, contextually bounded, and extinguishable at will; and that they serve as productive investments in the subject's personal development and self-actualization.[4] DukeEngage's slogan exemplifies this model of self-serving relationality (Fig. 9.1).

Grammatically speaking, the slogan "Challenge yourself. Change your world" quite literally positions the ego (you) as the central figure in the program's mission. This formulation leaves little room for doubt about the aims of DukeEngage, and whom precisely the program is intended to serve. Perhaps it should not be surprising that, in spite of the program's uplifting rhetoric about humility and service, it is Duke undergraduates who are ultimately the subjects of DukeEngage's work. After all, they (or their parents) are among the most influential constituents that the University serves. Transforming students, investing in their cultural capital, and enriching their opportunities for employment post-graduation: these are the unscripted ends that DukeEngage is tasked with achieving. To paraphrase Looser's intentionally absurd question: what kind of relationality is possible when the self finds identity without reference to any other? What kinds of connection does DukeEngage facilitate if its ultimate mission—and the message it sends undergraduates—is to employ service as a means of prioritizing investment in the self? Just as relationality in the neoliberal age always folds back onto itself, DukeEngage promotes a model of engagement in which relations with the other are sufficiently transformational to propel the subject along its own trajectory of self-authorship, while at the same time remaining temporary enough to preserve the ego from the substantial risks of real and sustained reciprocity.

Fig. 9.1 DukeEngage logo and slogan

> Anthropologist Richard Handler echoes this idea in a recent article examining the institutionalization of University of Virginia's new global development studies undergraduate major, in particular the ways undergraduate desires shape students' disciplinary object choice.[5] Handler writes that his undergraduate advisees conceive service "in an egocentric and individualistic fashion" (Handler, 2013, p. 190). Students
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> do not picture themselves in long-term social relationships with particular people to whom they are bound by multiple ties. Rather, the human object of their service is constituted as a function of their whimsical interests and personal biographies: they just happen to have gone on a service trip to such-and-such undeveloped, impoverished place; or they just happen to have conceived of a love for the study of, and travel to, such-and-such country. Global others are there to be chosen, and abandoned, more or less at will. (Handler, 2013, p. 190)

This account is consistent with the self-focused, even solipsistic language through which DukeEngage expresses its program aims (change *your* world), as well as the franchise model of service through which it advertises a seemingly inexhaustible variety of specific, yet substitutable program sites (from Miami to Serbia). Far from performing the relationality of global service incorrectly, then, it is the noncommittal—"whimsical" to use Handler's term—students who best live up to the expectations of a program like DukeEngage.

Indeed, in the marketplace of global service, undergraduates are taught to perform certain kinds of emotional or intellectual capacities, among them the "capacity to aspire" (Appadurai, 2013), the capacity to develop and usefully deploy passions, and the capacity to communicate across cultures. What I term the capacity to aspire (borrowing Appadurai's phrase) refers to students' ability to dream up ambitious service projects and development interventions that are conceived as addressing "real-world problems" while actually failing to be executable in practice (usually due to lack of expertise and financial resources). Service-learning programs like DukeEngage reward students for demonstrating a capacity to aspire rather than a capacity to achieve realistic and meaningful outcomes. Students are further encouraged to cultivate numerous "passions" and to implement these in ways that are strategic and self-promoting, all the while learning to speak about their passions in narratively compelling ways, as being disinterested, inevitable, and selfless. According to Handler, cross-cultural communication is one of the core technologies undergraduate students

feel they need in order to do good development work. Communication is a mutual, "two-way process," but one which is also imagined to be frictionless: "By some magical process," Handler writes, "[students] think they can will good communications into being across most, if not all, social divides. And good development work will follow good communications, in an equally magical process" (Handler, 2013, p. 188). This faith in intuitive, unhindered communication is central to how DukeEngage conceptualizes the challenges that students must confront and overcome during service. As one DukeEngage administrator puts it:

> Students will be expected to find ways to communicate in an environment filled with language barriers and political tensions…and to foster understanding between cultures…We can really connect on a very basic human level, even beyond language, and have the students take that away, the kind of possibilities that could be really amazing and endless, based on these types of human connections that we will be able to make. (Dudash, 2013)

In celebrating a kind of ecstatic yet generic "human connection," DukeEngage implicitly teaches students that they are capable of communicating effectively irrespective of differences in language, culture, and history (as the dismissal of "political tensions" makes clear), as long as they show up with the right attitude. In fact, just as geographical distance becomes meaningless difference through the endless proliferation of like forms under neoliberalism, so distinctions of language, culture, and history cease to matter when one is equipped with the universal passkey of "human connection."

The next section will follow a small group of undergraduate students participating in a DukeEngage service-learning program based in rural West Africa to examine how they attempt to utilize these affective capacities in the service context. I will argue that the realities of doing service in an unfamiliar setting force students to face up to the limits of this idealized mode of engagement. Events on the ground repeatedly revealed students to be unprepared for the real challenges of service. While all students experienced unplanned levels of discomfort and dissatisfaction in the service context, many showed impressive resilience in spite of their unpreparedness for these feelings. In the end, however, students' lasting perceptions and personal narrations of their time spent in the village appeared remarkably unaffected by the ambivalent realities of service, suggesting

that students who had completed the program had never acquired a language for articulating the richness—both positive and negative—of their own experiences.

Producing Hope, Managing Engagement

The preparations for an eight-week DukeEngage trip began long before the annual program-wide pre-departure orientation in May. By November of the previous year, the program director for the West Africa trip[6] had already begun a second round of interviews with interested undergraduates, and an independent study consisting of area readings in history and anthropology was planned for the spring semester. Throughout the interview process, the two of us often chatted casually about the composition of the group and our expectations for how the students would adjust to the service context. The program director had been traveling to the site for more than 25 years, and I was already comfortable with the way of life in rural West Africa, having previously spent a year living in the region on a research grant. Most of the students the program director interviewed had never visited the African continent; many had never traveled outside Western Europe; and several had never left the USA. We speculated good-naturedly about how certain students would fare in such an unusual and unfussy place, where the food and microbes were vastly different from home, and where there would be significant language barriers even for those who demonstrated the requisite level of competency. These were essential considerations for the effectiveness of the program as well as for the students own safety. The program director was looking for students who were not only enthusiastic (everyone was), but who also appeared to possess other essential qualities, like good sense, practicality, and grit. We weren't looking for starry-eyed idealists so much as for down-to-earth, hardworking pragmatists—especially those who had some relevant previous travel experience in the so-called developing world.

In the end, the group's composition was a result of compromise. While all of the selected students were academically impressive, most did not have the desired level of foreign language competency. Deficient students enthusiastically offered to take intensive language courses, pledging to learn as much as they could in the six months leading up to the trip, and the program director interpreted their keenness as a measure of determination. Language competency also played against the gender composition

of the group, as far more female than male applicants happened to be language proficient.[7] It soon became clear to us that it would be impossible to achieve a gender-balanced group while maintaining the program's standard of language competency across the board. In the end, it was decided that gender parity should be prioritized over language skills, in the interest of the students' group dynamics and the host community's desire to socialize with a diverse group of students. This meant accepting several students who had inadequate foreign language skills, but who seemed eager enough to learn. Unbeknownst to the program director and myself, our own adjudications during the interview process retraced some of the key tenets of service learning's sentimental education. Comparing character assessments and skill sets, we ultimately chose the majority of students on the basis of perceived personal qualities rather than demonstrable competencies, in the hope that the students with mettle would rise to the occasion.

Throughout the spring semester, the selected students met with the program director to complete guided general readings on the history and anthropology of the region, while also diving into their individual service interests. Each student had applied to the program with a particular project idea to develop, and during the independent study students were expected to begin background research on their project topics. It was at this stage that students demonstrated most clearly their entrepreneurial capacity to aspire—a skill that was neither tested for in the interview process nor explicitly taught at any point during their coursework at Duke. Each student possessed this uncanny ability to "dream big" without heeding to contingencies—planning projects which, even in the idea phase, far exceeded their own or others' ability to execute. The youngest student in the group had just completed her freshman year of college.[8] Having taken a microeconomics course the previous fall, she planned to initiate a micro-lending project for women and young people modeled after Grameen Bank,[9] and kept herself busy reading critiques of microcredit and writing a 20-page research paper comparing the strategies and outcomes of various micro-lending projects throughout Southeast Asia. Another student wanted to teach computer literacy classes to youth at the village computer center; this comparatively more modest and doable task was complicated by the fact that she spoke only beginning French and would have significant difficulty communicating with her charges. Meanwhile, an engineering student had applied for outside grant funding

and was attempting to complete a massive latrine installation on an empty lot near the market with the earnest yet erratic assistance of a group of village residents. Another student wanted to set up a single-payer village health insurance scheme, which he hoped would encourage families to use the nurse's station in the village more regularly. While these projects should be credited for being ambitious—reflecting the enthusiasm of their student incubators—they all lacked the vision and purpose (not to mention financing and expertise) required to bring them securely into reality. It may be tempting to attribute the students' pie-in-the-sky approach to the inherently quixotic nature of youth, even particularly American youth. But, as the preceding sections have shown, this sensibility is specifically encouraged through the program rhetoric of DukeEngage, as well as through a broader cultural script under neoliberalism that rewards abstract dreams over practical action. Reinforced by messages disseminated within the University, as well as by the prevailing cultural norms without, the capacity to aspire thus becomes an unwritten prerequisite for global service learning.

Following the program-wide pre-departure orientation in May and a round of routine immunizations at the student health center, the group of DukeEngage students headed to the service site, a small West African country, where they would be spending a total of eight weeks carrying out their individual projects. In my role as site coordinator and assistant program director, I was in the business of offering practical advice and emotional support to students as they navigated the challenges of service in an unfamiliar place. As the weeks wore on, I watched as the students' initial naïveté gave way to anxieties about making an impact, ultimately resolving into a more mature perspective that balanced the inevitable discomforts and disappointments of service with the numerous joys and satisfactions. But in order to develop the capacity of realistic aspiration (sadly undervalued these days!), students had to face many limitations, both their own and those of the host community. The next section discusses some of the difficulties students encountered in the service context, focusing on struggles to adjust physically, which posed certain challenges to the implementation of their projects.

Food, Taste, and the Limits of Hope

The state of the physical body, including experiences with food and illness, played a key role in students' ability to navigate the service context and execute their projects. Psychologists writing on the phenomenon of culture shock have emphasized the physical and emotional symptoms of distress that

accompany this experience of feeling deeply and existentially out of place (Adler, 1975; Bochner & Furnham, 1982; Bochner, Furnham, & Ward, 2001). And indeed students' experiences of displacement in the service context evidenced a complex interweaving of both physical and emotional symptoms.

Food and nourishment proved to be one of most difficult areas in which students were challenged, partly because problems with food and changes of diet were unforeseen, having never been addressed in the discussions about adjustment during the program-wide pre-departure orientation. Food was therefore somewhat of a blind spot for the students—and, as it happened, for the program director and myself. The program director had been eating the local food for more than 20 years, and it had become completely normalized to his palate. Still, his previous experience traveling to the area with undergraduates revealed students to be picky about eating certain local dishes, and he was rightly sensitive about food as a potentially difficult adjustment issue. He had therefore spoken with host families in the village and encouraged them to serve local food three times a week and more accessible fare the other nights (typically spaghetti or rice with a spicy tomato sauce, or fried omelets). These admittedly "touristy" accommodations seemed to work reasonably well, allowing students to adjust better to the radical changes in diet, incorporating new local flavors in recognizable and non-threatening forms, while still encouraging students to eat typical meals with their host families as much as possible. The program director had made further efforts to describe the local food to prospective students during the first round of interviews to make certain they were open to trying new things; their enthusiastic responses to his queries and his previous experiences with students who adjusted successfully suggested that food would not be an issue for this group. I also had a certain bias in this regard. While I was unfamiliar with the specific ways of cooking and eating in the service site, I had had positive eating experiences during my previous travel in the region, and eagerly anticipated the opportunity to compare and contrast sauces, greens, and preparation techniques with the cuisine to which I had already become habituated. Perhaps equally significant, I am a self-confessed *gourmande* with an adventurous palate; while food matters a lot to my happiness, I will eat (and appreciate) most anything put before me. For all of these reasons combined, neither the program director nor myself were able to anticipate how challenging matters of food and taste would be for the students in our charge.

Problems with food and eating emerged early on during the eight-week trip, and were symptomatic of students' ongoing struggle with "culture shock." Instead of alternating Westernized food with local meals several nights a week, five students out of seven flatly refused to touch the local porridge (*moto*) and sauce, and were eating exclusively spaghetti and rice (with the occasional omelet) for dinner. During group lunches, two young women in the group complained loudly that the *moto* made them "gag," describing in unnecessary detail how the food reminded them of previous times they had been sick at the beginning of the trip. These complaints had a chilling effect on other students' willingness to sample new foods, and it was clear that several others had begun avoiding *moto* or eating it in cautious, birdlike morsels because they had been influenced by their peers' tastes. It soon became apparent to the program director and myself that most students were not trying the local food with their host families at all. The situation was doubly burdensome for those students' host families, who not only had to spend more of the students' accommodation payments on expensive canned tomatoes and spaghetti noodles, but who also had to cook multiple meals, since their own families would not eat the students' food. But the students' contagious intolerance of the local food was upsetting to the program director and myself on another level, because it suggested that the students were not really connecting with what we—as cultural anthropologists—took to be the purpose of the trip. Eating inauthentic food night after night was not allowing students to really be present in the site, and it was preventing them from connecting with the people whom they purportedly wanted to serve. We wanted students to take gustatory risks in the site because this kind of experimentation in taste (Solomon, 2014) is part of what we both value about being anthropologists. Finally of course, we worried that students were not being properly nourished with this abnormally restrictive diet, as all of the nutrients were to be found in the vegetable sauces and locally milled grains they were assiduously avoiding.

During this extended eating crisis, students would hoard packaged food they had brought with them from home, as well as imported processed food they had purchased in the larger regional market town. Often, as the group idled together or walked between meeting sites, the students' conversations would turn to food: expressions of disgust at the meals they observed their host families eating; ravenous descriptions of their methods

for rationing cookies between weekly trips to town; salivating reminiscences of favorite foods from home; and detailed menus of what they planned to eat upon their return. Midway through the trip, a DukeEngage administrator made a routine site visit, bringing with her Ziploc bags full of Cliff bars and electrolyte packets, as well as extra insect repellent. The students hungrily divided the Cliff bars among themselves, disputing flavor choices, and the number of bars to which each student was entitled. The administrator, who had a motherly air and represented a welcome connection with home, was quickly and unequivocally adored.

It took some experimentation of our own, but the program director and I finally found a strategy for approaching food in a way that encouraged students to be open-minded while not (we hoped) triggering reactions of disgust or cascading complaints. Having eagerly sampled much of the prepared food at the village's Saturday market, I often carried around bags of bean fritters, rice flour doughnuts, and groundnut confectionary, offering these treats to students when we crossed paths, describing how they were made, and teaching students how to ask for them in the local language. I was pleased to see that this strategy worked on the two women with the overactive gag reflex, who also turned out to share a love of sweets. Soon, I was hearing positive reviews from both of them about the fritters to which they had newly become "addicted"—not exactly the intended result, but still an encouraging sign that they were feeling more comfortable branching out. A second successful strategy was a compromise between eating more local food and eating more healthfully. By the middle of the trip, the students who were subsisting on spaghetti and omelets were now (predictably) complaining of the monotony. This food to which they had turned with relief when they were sickened by the local fare was now making them feel nauseous from overexposure. Meanwhile, the one Westernized meal that the program director and I enjoyed with our host family was a *salade composée* made with lettuce, tomatoes, red onions, carrots, and other fresh vegetables from the larger town market where the family matriarch liked to shop every other week. Supplemented with canned mackerel and a mayonnaise-based salad dressing, the meal was delicious, fun to eat, and nourishing. By sheer happenstance one evening, a student had come to our homestead to ask a question and found everyone eating salad from generous metal bowls. Clearly hurt by the injustice, she immediately exclaimed how lucky we were to eat such good food! The next day, everyone had heard about the famous salad and was

requesting that their host families make similar food on market day once a week. The matriarchs rolled their eyes at the extra work, but were secretly happy to have a reason to dress up and travel together by taxi to the larger market in the regional capital. Fritters, salads, a dwindling candy stash—and the ever-approaching reality of tasting familiar foods at home—were enough in the end to satisfy students, quelling the intense viscerality of culture shock until it was finally time for them to leave.

Significantly, students' struggles with food were not unrelated to their performance and engagement within the service context. It has become clear to me that our students' multiple preoccupations with food—their strong aversions to local tastes (in both senses of the word), their hoarding and rationing of European processed foods, and their compulsive fantasies about dishes they would eat once they returned home—were symptomatic of other, more private anxieties. These food-related symptoms were telling us something about that which remained unspeakable for the students themselves, expressing a wide range of possible emotions: fears of disappointing the host community; worries about not being able to accomplish the goals to which they felt committed; shame surrounding the apparent gulf between students' own and host community members' income and education status; or guilt—perhaps stemming from the nagging sense that, even in an encounter framed by ostensibly selfless virtues, all of us might actually be taking more than we were giving.

Students' chronic preoccupations with food also had a significant impact on their effectiveness as communicators and learners in the service context. Indeed, it mattered very much to the service outcomes how and in what ways students were able to connect with the host community. The student working on microfinance projects could not appreciate what it meant for young beneficiaries to receive credit for a small business—I think—until she had tasted snacks at the market, observed how these foods were prepared in the home, and learned what ingredients, supplies, and other inputs and conditions were required for a young person's hobby to become commercially viable. Likewise, a student studying local farming practices was only able to make strides with his project once he began participating in local drinking sessions following a day's work in the fields. I want to suggest that such a visceral mode of engagement—an engagement that passes through the senses, as well as the mind—while undervalued by DukeEngage's current teaching model, is precisely the kind of relational capacity required for service performed with humility, curiosity, and a good faith commitment to putting oneself (one's self) at risk.

The Education of Hope

As this chapter has shown, hope was a palpable and recurrent theme of this particular service-learning trip, emerging under multiple guises. I have argued that DukeEngage condenses the institutional hopes invested in the rehabbed image of a University with global aspirations. In another sense, overnightly meals together in our village homestead, the program director and I expressed our joint hope that the students would be transformed by their experience in a critical sense, becoming able to examine their own motives for doing service, and learning to denaturalize service's status as an unquestionable good. We watched as the students discovered their own bodily and gustatory limitations, and as they worked to come to terms with their inflated expectations for service outcomes in the face of real events. In yet another iteration, students described to us their personal hopes to make an "impact" in the service context, hopes they would also express as gnawing preoccupations with the kind of "legacy" they would leave behind, and with the ways they would be remembered by villagers once they had gone home. As I see it now, these valleys were missed opportunities for the adults in charge (DukeEngage administrators in Durham, the program director, and myself) to offer more directed support to help students untangle their confused feelings, and to diagnose particular worries and frustrations as normal reactions to the process of doing service in relation with others. Rather than merely reassuring students, as we tried to do, we might instead have opened a space for a more frank conversation about the emotional challenges of service learning and development work, and the unexamined cultural assumptions underlying all of these endeavors.

In this discussion, I have suggested that the neoliberal "capacity to aspire,"[10] which structures service learning as a historically specific mode of sentimental engagement, is at best a kind of hollow hope that leaves students ill-prepared for the concrete and embodied realities of living and working through difference, in relation with others. What would it take to recuperate hope from this flimsy formulation, to give it substance and real-world traction? One possibility emerges through the work of Ernst Bloch, as interpreted by the queer theorist José Muñoz in his book *Cruising Utopia* (2009). Drawing on Bloch's materialist philosophy, Muñoz argues that the state of being queer is always a horizon, like the "not-yet-conscious" in Bloch's version of unfolding futurity. Utopian spaces, which create a rift in what Muñoz cleverly terms "straight time," are often carved out of banal material existence through attentiveness to the ephemeral.

Thus poet Frank O'Hara finds in the scene of two men sharing a Coke, a moment where the potentiality of queer intimacy acquires solid, if fleeting, presence. Following Bloch, Muñoz distinguishes between abstract and concrete utopias. Abstract utopias, which are "akin to banal optimism," contrast with the productive solidity of concrete utopias:

> Concrete utopias can also be daydream like, but they are the hopes of a collective, an emergent group, or even the solitary oddball who is the one who dreams for many. Concrete utopias are the realm of educated hope. (Muñoz, 2009, p. 3)

Concrete utopias bring a vision of the future into alignment with the realities of historical and present-day struggle. To borrow Muñoz's term, what would it take to move from a position of neoliberal sentimentality to one of "educated hope"? How might we as educators and mentor figures support undergraduate students in this developmental transition? How might we teach students how to produce realistic aspirations while coaxing them into an attitude of healthy curiosity and experimentation? These questions have pursued me in the years since I completed the DukeEngage trip, and have been a significant motivation for writing this piece.

In the months following the students' return to Duke, it became clear that many of them were unable (or were simply not encouraged) to articulate the vicissitudes of their own experiences. At a fall semester informational meeting for new students interested in the West Africa program, the previous summer's group was present to show pictures, answer questions, and provide commentary on their experiences. I became somewhat disheartened as I listened to students talk about the trip in generically positive terms as a "great opportunity" or an "awesome learning experience." These banal descriptors could not begin to express the nuanced topography—both low points and highlights—of each student's experience. Each one of the students in our group had lived through legitimately uncomfortable and in some cases profound moments during the trip—not least of which, the experience of one's body struggling to acclimate to an environment of unfamiliar flavors and textures, as I have described above. And while most of these students had become newly sensitive to their tastes and (to some extent) cultural biases through challenges encountered in the service context, all now appeared incapable of describing these experiences in ways that did justice to their complexity. As I sat listening during the students' presentations, I wondered how we as educators involved

with DukeEngage could help students integrate and evaluate their experiences in ways that might be more personally and socially meaningful. This, to me, is both the major problem and the major opportunity facing university-sponsored service-learning programs like DukeEngage.

In general, the preponderance of a flat, noncommittal, unrevealing language—apparent both in DukeEngage promotional materials and in students' own narrations of their experiences in the service context—suggests that something may have been lost in our collective rush to celebrate the capacity to aspire. This missing factor is an undervalued sensibility I have provisionally called the *capacity to relate*. Ultimately (and regardless of mission statement sloganeering) service-learning programs are in the basic business of creating and managing relationships, both in the immediate service context and beyond. Forming students who know how to extend themselves—students who will put their "selves" at risk—is imperative, unless we are willing to settle for the neoliberal order that Tom Looser has so chillingly described: a world built on a vacuous foundation, devoid of reciprocity and meaningful difference (Looser, 2012). A sad promise, indeed.

One way of refusing this empty world within the context of university-sponsored service-learning programs would be for us to commit ourselves to rigorously account for the relational complexities of service learning. We might start by taking seriously students' notions about "opportunities" and "learning experiences" as cultural categories. Words such as these are emic terms that summon specific affects, capacities, and projections of the self into an imagined future. In particular, the term "learning experience" indexes students' ability to decathect from challenges and other unpleasant but formative trials. However penetrating and hurtful one's experience of discomfort, shame, or disappointment, a "learning experience" can be invoked to insulate the ego from negative effects associated with failure, thus allowing injured students to reboot their capacity to aspire. But a colloquialism that allows the ego to gracefully dissociate from the pain of failure only becomes a mark of fluency in an environment that denies students a safe forum in which to celebrate their vulnerabilities alongside their accomplishments. This is the hallmark of an order that cares more about the capacity to aspire than the capacity to relate. In glossing over the imperfections of service as it is actually lived, the term "learning experience" allows students to continue to operate within the superficial realm of hopeful engagement. Rather than applauding the simple optimism of this expression, we as educators ought to consider invocations of

the "learning experience" as crucial moments to engage more deeply: to prod, ask questions, and guide students through the real work—indeed, the real service—of making educated hope.

Notes

1. Progressivism emerges out of John Dewey's individualist experiential philosophy of education, while pragmatism typically refers to the philosophical method of William James, who (by way of C.S. Peirce) upheld an empiricist inquiry based in concreteness over abstraction.
2. This role required my attendance at a pre-departure orientation in Durham, North Carolina, as well as my presence on-site in the rural West African village in which students lived and carried out their service projects.
3. "About DukeEngage." http://dukeengage.duke.edu/about-dukeengage. Accessed September 30, 2015.
4. The biopolitical overtones of this phrasing are intentional. See Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008).
5. See Wiegman (2012) for a more complete discussion of desire and disciplinary formation.
6. In the interest of confidentiality, some details (including the location of the program and names of participants) have been withheld or modified.
7. There were also gender disparities within the greater applicant pool, as many more young women than young men expressed interest in the West Africa program. On the basis of observations at the program-wide pre-departure orientation and conversations with other program directors, it became clear to me that the gender balance varied significantly across the spectrum of DukeEngage programs. While certain programs appeared to easily attract equal numbers of women and men, others like ours had far more women participants than men. There appeared to be no program with more men than women participating.
8. To protect students' identities, some personal and project-related details have been altered.
9. The progenitor of microfinance, Grameen Bank is a community bank founded by Muhammad Yunus in Bangladesh in 1976. Grameen has been critiqued for its part in fostering a culture of shame around

debt status in rural India and Bangladesh, and for its practice of maintaining high interest rates to discourage participants from holding debt.

10. I borrow and reinterpret this term from Appadurai's (2013) original usage.

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