Treballs de la Societat Catalana de Geografia, 52, 2001 (383-392)

Teaching The «Other»: Linking Knowledge, Emotion, and Action in Geographical Education[1]

Janice Monk
University of Arizona
President of American Association Geographers

I am honored by having been invited to speak to you this evening and bring you greetings from the Association of American Geographers. It is important that we have relationships between organizations that support the work of geographers and bring it to wider audiences. My own connection with Catalan geographers began in 1984 when I first met Agustín Hernando at a symposium of the Commission on Geographical Education of the International Geographical Union, and has continued since then, especially with colleagues at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, particularly Maria Dolors Garcia Ramon and the gender studies group, at international conferences, through my visits here, and through visits to Arizona by several Catalan geographers, one of whom, Toni Luna, earned his Ph.D. with us there. Yet the more I come to know this place, the more I realize there is to learn, and on several levels — which brings me to my theme for this evening — the ways in which learning, especially about that which is «other» than oneself, involves linking of knowledge, emotion, and action and experience. First, I would like to make some comments on how I came to this topic and what I mean by the «other.»

The recognition in Western societies of increasing diversity *within* cultures and of expressions of «identity politics» has stimulated scholarship on what Anglo-Saxon scholars, at least, have come to call the «other» — a term that covers peo-

* Conferència realitzada el 26 de març de 2001.

1. A longer version of this paper has been published as «Looking Out, Looking In: The 'Other'» in the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 24(2), 2000, 163-178. It is reproduced here with the permission of the editors.

ple who differ from the hegemonic population on the basis of their race/ethnicity, immigrant status, religion, poverty, gender, life stage — children and the elderly, sexual orientation, physical ability, or even their rural rather than urban residence. It even extends to thinking about non-human animals and «nature». The concept implies unequal relations of power. My own interest in the «other» is more than academic, however, or one that is shaped by currently fashionable literature. It goes back to my early life in Australia and my family's history there. About 1860, my great-grandparents immigrated to Australia from England, Ireland, and Wales. Though they left no written records about their sense of identity or perceptions of their previous or new homes, my maternal grandmother, born Australia, often told me how her grandmother still in England had been anxious that the Aborigines of Australia would eat the grandchildren. There was certainly a consciousness and fear of the «other.»

But enough of my ancestors — other parts of my life have also prompted my focus on the «other», among them growing up in Australia at a time when non-British immigrants began to arrive in large numbers, by my first experiencing the United States as the only woman post-graduate student in my department of geography, and now as I live in a city close to the US-Mexican border. The educational institutions with which I've been associated have not always been sensitive to their contexts or the diversity of their societies and students, however — the Latin motto of my undergraduate institution, the University of Sydney, translates into English as «the stars may be different, but the mind is the same.» Today, we are not so sure of that position. In my work over the last two decades or more, in gender studies and international studies, I have become increasingly interested in thinking about how the ways in which we teach have bearing on students' responses to the «other». As geographers, we want students to understand their own identity in relation to place, but those places are increasingly complex — they are culturally heterogenous and ever more connected to people and places beyond the local. When I had the opportunity about a year ago to prepare a lecture sponsored by the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,* I decided to focus on the theme of how we teach about the «other». I first reviewed what had been published in over twenty years of that journal, which aims to be international in scope, and second I drew on the writings of some colleagues in geography and in women and gender studies who have been motivated to change the ways in which knowledge about «others» is created and understandings developed (MONK, 2000). While the theme raises many philosophical questions, I think it is also important to look at the practical ones of actual teaching strategies, and I will tend to emphasize that aspect in my lecture.

Teaching the «Other» - Paradigms and Contexts

Identifying who is the «other» and what makes up «difference» shifts with the contexts in which we teach and with the paradigms, categories, and sources

we bring to our students. One of the clearest examples of this in my experience actually comes from a situation here in Barcelona in 1993 during an ERASMUS course on gender and geography. It brought together students and university teachers from Amsterdam, Athens, the Autonoma of Barcelona, Durham, Roskilde, and Sheffield. A French geographer, employed in a research center to study national family policies, presented a national scale analysis of women's fertility, comparing the implications of French and German policies on maternity leave and child care. She was stunned by the vocal attack from British students trained in postmodernism who argued that it was not legitimate to compare France and Germany as such because each included diverse groups of women. Her own work experience had not prepared her for focusing on difference in this way, and the students' education had apparently not prepared them to recognize that questions about «difference» can be addressed at different geographic scales. The encounter did not create a dialogue that enlightened either side, but reminded me that we need to think about ways to further such understanding. In another example, at a geographic education conference that I attended in New Zealand, it was evident that «difference» meant bi-culturalism, prioritizing the two categories of indigenous Maori and white New Zealander, and that a multi-culturalism that took account of the substantial and increasing presence of other immigrant groups was not on the agenda for these geographic educators.

Not surprisingly, a teaching activity can have very different effects as the context and student body shift. Ralph Saunders, a young white American geography professor, recently described how his teaching about racism, resistance, and African American rap music was received very differently by students in predominantly white classrooms in Arizona than in a multiracial classroom in California (SAUNDERS, 1999). In the more diverse classroom, his rights to deal with the topic were challenged in emotional ways. Similarly, Japanese Canadian geographer, Audrey Kobayashi, who teaches a course on race and racism at Queens University has written, «I sometimes feel as if I am carrying a bomb into class, and if I am unsuccessful in establishing the right degree of comfort (or discomfort) it will explode with irreversible results...what is comfortable for some is uncomfortable for others (KOBAYASHI, 1999, p. 179). She discusses not only the dramatic differences in what students say, but also the meanings of silences, the ways in which white guilt emerges, and how she tries to bring theory, fact, and feelings together to address racism.

The emotions lie not only in our students. Some of my colleagues in women's studies, trained mainly in the history and cultures of the United States, have experienced strong anxieties as they worked to strengthen international perspectives in their teaching. As one wrote: «my deepest resistance...arose from my discomfort with teaching materials of whose cultural/historical context I was glaringly ignorant...Although I was experienced in generalizing about past women's experiences from my training as a historian, I was loath to represent living women about whom I knew little beyond a text, however compelling

that text may be» (LENSINK, 1991, p. 279). Her uneasiness peaked in a workshop on African women writers whose names she could not spell. Was she prepared to give up the authority of the teacher, she wondered, and admit the limits of her knowledge in the classroom? Would students see an admission of her limited knowledge as an indication that the materials were unimportant, or could she convey that they were so rich that her limited reading could not provide the breadth of knowledge necessary to answer all questions.

Such matters, especially relating to feelings and emotions, are not dealt with in any sustained way in the literature about teaching geography in higher education. Although the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* does include some articles about teaching ethics and values, most relate to environmental concerns, with a few about social issues, and a number of them are more philosophical than practical in their approach. Nevertheless, they do pose important questions. Should our goals as teachers be to promote particular values, such as pro-environmentalism, anti-racism, non-sexism or feminism? Should we advocate particular positions on at least some issues, or instead, aim to foster critical thinking skills to enable students to make more insightful and contextual moral judgements themselves? The choices present a dilemma that anthropologists Lila Abu-Lhugod, writing about international education frames thus: «I want to teach (students) to appreciate that others do not live as they do, and that their systems for organizing gender relations may be different from but are not inferior to ours. As a feminist, I would want to be critical of systems of domination, especially around gender. The dilemma is how to teach appreciation without apology and criticism without ethnocentrism» (ABU-LHUGOD, 1998, p.26).

Knowledge and Critical Thinking Skills

Many of the teaching strategies that geographers have written about in the *Journal of Higher Education* are designed to improve students' abilities to think critically about information and methodologies. Of particular interest to me are some examples that deal with teaching about Africa and the «third world,» addressing the issue of whose knowledge is being presented. Helen Ruth Aspaas, who teaches a course in the United States about the geography of Africa, early in her course introduces students to readings on African philosophies and world views (ASPAAS, 1998). She then requires them to examine information from African print and electronic media so they can assess how materials *on* African themes presented *from* African perspectives contrast with those presented in the West.. British geographer Margaret Harrison asks students to take apart representations of the «Third World» that appear in contrasting posters, newspaper articles, and maps in order to understand the specific positions the authors are representing, and how their representations can influence the development of stereotypes about «Third World» peoples and places (HARRISON, 1995). A num-

ber of geographers have adopted the approach of bringing multiple sources, not only scholarly articles, but also creative works of fiction and film, into the classroom in order not just to convey information, but to highlight the diverse perspectives of peoples such as minorities and indigenous authors whose «voices» are not usually represented among the authors of academic works.

Fostering Empathy

Beyond the issue of developing critical perspectives and skills, however, is that of fostering empathy. How can we teach so as to promote identification with and understanding of ways in which the «Other» might see and experience the world? What might the implications of such teaching be for the self and for changing policies and practices in one's own society. While a few articles in the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* advocate field experience and group work as ways to develop personal skills and awareness of difference, for the most part they have either addressed the development of attitudes that have professional utility, such as the capacity to work in a team, or to develop presentations, or have assumed that understanding will develop from simple exposure to diverse environments and factual information about them. Students may be led to analyze how spaces and places were created and/or experienced by different groups who live in them, but not prompted to assess their own reactions. Although exposure to difference in the field may advance empathy, the authors who have described their field teaching for the most part have not reported the voices of students that might reveal whether and how empathy was developed. An interesting piece of research with students in New Zealand, carried out by Karen Nairn, found that for some students, field trips in ethnically diverse neighborhoods reinforced negative stereotypes and feelings of fear, insecurity, and privilege (NARIRN, 1999).

In thinking about empathy, I have found it useful to draw on an article by Roger Robinson, a British specialist in geographic education, who interviewed high school students on their views of Third World peoples. His interviews revealed that they often demonstrate sympathy and paternalism rather than what he identifies as realistic empathy: «a willingness to accept another person as equal; an understanding of the context within which the other person lives (social, environmental, economic, and political); and an acceptance that the other person's value system and way of looking at things is a valid alternative to one's own» (ROBINSON, 1988, pp. 154-55). I have introduced his ideas in workshops with teachers designed to address teaching about women cross-culturally, accompanying his work with an exercise in which I use clips from three videos on women, work, and family in the Middle East. I raise the question of whether and how the approaches taken by the three film makers might or might not foster empathy, a sense of realism, and the possibilities that women have possibilities of changing their own lives, rather than being dependent only

on paternalistic «help.» What choices might a teacher make if they were trying to help their students to empathize with these women?

The filmmakers' techniques of representation, not just the factual material presented, will have an impact on the ways students see Middle Eastern women. The first clip includes the opening sequences of *Arab Women at Work*, made by the United Nations Development Program at a conference in Cairo. It is introduced by a male British narrator; women social scientists and political figures discuss statistics and policies while the visual images are mostly scenes of silent women at work in the fields. The second, from the Dutch film, *Daughters of the Nile,* is presented in Arabic with English subtitles; a few rural women speak of their arranged marriages and hard work; there are extended shots without dialogue but with 'exotic' music. The women are engaged in physical work that would be outside the students' experience (for example, making mud bricks, doing laundry in the river). The final clip, from *Family Ties,* shows the opening scenes of a film in which a Jordanian woman journalist based in London talks about how she came to make this program on urban families; she is filmed conducting a home-based interview with a woman in Amman. The interview is presented in Arabic with English sub-titles. The woman is identified by the journalist as a successful business woman who makes and sells dresses that incorporate traditional patterns. She is asked for her opinions about changes in marriage and family customs, and expresses support for the traditional while allowing that people can make their own choices and live with them.

Viewers usually choose either the second or third rather than the first of these selections, depending to a substantial extent on whether they feel comfortable with what they see as the exoticism of the second or whether they are willing to accept an urban dialogue as representative of the Middle East and the women within it. The «expert» mode of the first film is seen as conveying social science «information» but not presenting a sense of Middle Eastern women (though, of course, it does show that there is diversity among women). Regardless of the choices made, the exercise provides a useful way to open discussion of how the modes of representation in materials we use for teaching may shape students' responses to the «Other.»

Connecting knowledge, emotion, and experience

Frances Slater is one of the few scholars I know in geography, at least in the English-language literature, who has paid sustained attention to bringing thinking and feeling, reason and emotion, into geographic education in order to achieve moral understanding and cultural sensitivity. In her work with school-level geography (SLATER 1993, 1994), she suggests procedures for working through the analysis and clarification of values, in for example, role playing and decision-making exercises — beginning with an analysis of the situations

and values options, exploring the rationale for decisions, examining their consequences, and asking for justification in relation to the criteria students employed and in relation to other values they might hold. She argues for contextualized and embedded learning, for bringing experience and reflection on that experience into the learning process. I would like to mention a couple of examples reported in the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education.* British geographer Jane Dove presented her students with the assignment of creating an urban field trip guide which they were required implement their guides with different groups of users (DOVE, 1997). The students' reports indicated that the project increased their sensitivity to others' perceptions and the hazards they faced – to the difficulties of using a wheel chair on cobbled streets, to signs placed too high to read from a seated position, to steps that make sites inaccessible, slopes too steep or slippery for the partially sighted or blind, and the general lack of awareness of children's needs and interests in much development of field guides. My second example is from the work of Australian geographer, William Boyd (BOYD, 1996). He teaches in a rural college where the students are most of Anglo-Celtic heritage, but where he is charge with teaching about the management of lands that are sacred to the Aboriginal people. Rather than limiting his teaching to discussions of Aboriginal culture and sites, he begins by asking students to evaluate local sites that represent their own heritage, asking which six of thirteen they would select for destruction if not all could be preserved. They have to give their reasons and also to speculate on how a person from another culture might respond to these sites. When he reviews the responses with the class, it is evident that the sites they choose to preserve are often of some spiritual significance, such as local cemeteries, despite the fact that they are living in a largely secular culture. Proceeding by analogy, he then has the students consider Aboriginal sacred sites. He reports that the exercise both increases students' sensitivity to the «Other» and raises their awareness of the extent of their own Euro-Australian enculturation.

It is such juxtapositions that my colleagues in women's studies have found useful in helping students to understand meanings of gender and what might be called «culturally challenging practices» such as veiling of women in the Middle East or female genital surgeries in some African cultures. To deal with such examples they recommend *contextualizing* the practices in historical, social, economic, and cultural circumstances, *comparing* them with analogous practices in Western cultures, only then *critiquing* if appropriate, drawing on the work of women directly affected by such practices, and finally, exploring opportunities for building coalitions for change. In another example, Julie Daniels, at the University of Minnesota, asks students to write a paragraph in their second most fluent language (DANIELS, 1998). For the largely monolingual US students, this task provides an example of the panic, embarrassments, and frustrations that non-native speakers of English may feel in settings where they are forced to communicate in a language other than their

own. And it fosters respect among the monolingual for the language capacities of many «others.»

To connect theoretical and experiential learning, the personal and the political, some of my colleagues in women's studies at the University of Arizona have created an exercise they refer to as an «outrageous act». Students are asked to develop and carry out an action within specified parameters — they must identify some norm or stereotype, remain within the bounds of non-violence and legality, and cause no harm. They are required to reflect on their own feelings and the reactions of others when they implement the action they have designed. A number of the acts students have created involve transgressions of space and place. A male student, for example, ran a video, about a Russian ballet company, *Backstage at the Kirov,* in the very masculine space of his residential complex on campus. He was harassed by some two dozen of the young men, but to his surprise, a friend sat down and watched the video with him the student reported: «There is a certain pressure to do what is expected of you because of your gender, and if you step out of that mold then you get criticized or questioned. I think when my friend sat down next to me and began to watch that it was cool, because not only did he not criticize me for stepping outside what would normally be expected, he stepped with me» (SHATTUCK et al., 199, p.209).

A woman student's act involved entering the space curtained-off for pornographic material in a local used-book store. The first time she entered, «all the men fled like roaches» (SHATTUCK et al., p.209). The second time, a customer complained and the manager asked her to leave, which she attempted to do with dignity. As one male student remarked in connection with his act: «I was more scared...than I've been of anything in quite a while. I've learned that it really does take courage to question oppression and challenge sexism. I know now that some things we most take for granted require more effort and bravery than we consider» (SHATTUCK et al., 1999, p. 208).

Another approach to linking theory and practice, knowing, feeling, emotion and action which might seem less contrived than the «outrageous act» is the placement of students in community agencies that are addressing social change and social service. Teachers who advocate such work, often referred to as «service learning», argue that participation in voluntary and service projects takes students beyond the passive gaze of traditional field trips, addresses moral and political issues, and engages them directly with the local «other» (JOHNSON & OLIVER, 1991; MOHAN, 1995; BUCKINGHAM-HATFIELD, 1995). Emotions, confidence, responsibility, and building of trust are called for and upon, while academic knowledge and skills are developed. Such projects have their critics, however, and could lead to feelings of paternalism, sympathy, or superiority. They call for thoughtful supervision, contextualization, and reflection. Teachers have found it useful to provided students with questions for reflection in ongoing journals, leading them to see how the power of the individual interacts with the powers of institutions, and that both are subject to change (MCDANIEL, 1998).

Concluding Thoughts

In conclusion, I want to note that my own opportunities to encounter the «other», not least those here in Barcelona, have offered me many rewards — to connect personally and professionally with a wide range of people, to exercise editorial and other powers and privileges to promote work about which I care. The experiences have contributed to widening my world and I hope, to greater understanding of, and empathy with the «other». But I see challenges remaining if we are to move forward. We need to work still more energetically to engage the voices of «others» in our teaching and research; to increase collaboration across national boundaries, as has been encouraged by such programs as ERASMUS, to participate in international endeavors such as those of the IGU or the recently formed International Network for Learning and Teaching in Geography.[2] In the English language journals we need to review works by scholars outside the Anglo-Saxon world, and in so-called international journals published in English we need to engage a wider group of geographers in reviewing manuscripts submitted for publication. Where possible, we need to do more joint field teaching, bringing students and teachers together, rather than simply descending on the «other» or occasionally introducing students to a «local expert» in a foreign place. We need to experiment with electronic technology to bring students together across cultural boundaries. The challenges are great, but the opportunities are there. In increasingly diverse and «global» societies, as geographers, I think we need to reflect on ways in which our work with students shapes their identities. Do we foster ethnocentricity or nationalism, or openness and respect for «others» while still validating the self? In this quest, I believe we need to think more deeply about approaches to teaching that bring knowledge, emotion, and action together in teaching and learning. I hope I have stimulated you to think about some of the possibilities.

2. The network can be accessed through http://www.inlt.org

References

ABU-LHUGOD, Lila (1998). «Contentious theoretical issues: third world feminisms and identity politics. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 26 (3&4), p. 25-29.

BOYD, William E. (1996). «The significance of significance in cultural heritage studies: a role for cultural analogues in applied geography teaching». *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,* 20 (3), p. 295-304.

BUCKINGHAM-HATFIELD, Susan (1995). «Student-community partnerships: advocating community enterprise projects in geography». *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,* 19 (2), p. 143-150.

DOVE, Jane (1997). «Perceptual geography through urban trails». *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,* 21 (1), p. 79-88.

JOHNSON, James H. Jr.; OLIVER, Melvin (1991). «Urban poverty and social welfare policy in the United States: an undergraduate research training program». *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,* 15 (1), p. 25-34.

KOBAYASHI, Audrey (1999). «'Race' and racism in the classroom: some thoughts on unexpected moments». *Journal of Geography,* 98 (4), p. 179-182.

MCDANIEL, Judith (1998). «Creating an international perspective on local activism (with syllabus and exercises). *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 26 (3&4), p.77-87.

MOHAN, John (1995). «Thinking local: service learning, education for citizenship and geography». *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,* 19 (2), p. 129-142.

MONK, Janice (1999). «Looking out, looking in: the «Other» in the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*». *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,* 24 (2), p. 163-177.

SAUNDERS, Ralph (1999). «Teaching rap: the politics of race in the classroom». *Journal of Geography*, 98 (4), p. 185-188.

SLATER, Frances (1993). *Learning Through Geography.* Indiana, PA: National Council for Geographic Education.

SLATER, Frances (1994). «Education through geography: knowledge, understanding, values, and culture». *Geography,* 79 (343), p. 147-163.