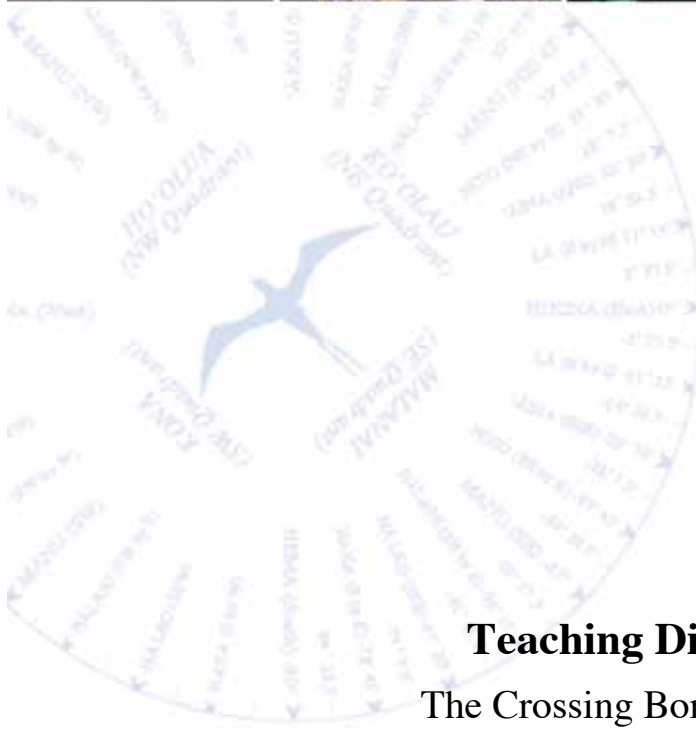


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Teaching Diversity for Democracy The Crossing Borders and Mosaic Programs

Susan D. Rose

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Teaching Diversity for Democracy

The Crossing Borders and Mosaic Programs

Susan D. Rose

Introduction

At Dickinson College, we are committed to preparing our students for global citizenship. In order to succeed, our students must be given the opportunity to develop the inter-cultural awareness, knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will prepare them for citizenship in our society and world. Until our students can truly appreciate that they are part of one world and many peoples, at home and abroad, the unifying force of our educational efforts will not be realized. Our challenge, then, is two-fold: to create an intellectual community that prepares all of its members to live creatively, productively, and harmoniously in a multi-cultural world and society; and to diversify our present campus population by providing an academic and social environment in which all students and faculty can thrive and contribute effectively to a culturally and ethnically diverse nation and world. One of the most effective ways we have found of doing this is to engage our students in fieldwork with diverse communities.

Dickinson College is an historically white college, and remains predominantly so. The challenge for us is how to engage primarily white students in meaningful dialogues about diversity, even as we work actively to diversify the student and faculty body. In this presentation, we would like to present a number of models that are working effectively within the classroom, and across the academic, co-curricular, and student-life parts of the community. The American and Global Mosaic programs have brought diverse groups of students together with residents and workers in communities both close to home (Steelton and Adams County, Pennsylvania) and far away - Comodoro Rivadavia in Patagonia, Argentina. In each case, students and faculty worked in research teams with community members to collect oral histories, organize archival data, and analyze census and socio-economic data that reveal the origins and continuing development of these communities.

We will highlight two curricular models: *the Crossing Borders* program that brings students from two Historically Black Colleges (HBCUs: Spelman and Xavier) and a predominantly white institution (PWI: Dickinson) to spend the summer studying together in Cameroon, West Africa. Students then return for the fall semester to Dickinson College, and to Spelman or Xavier for the spring semester. [**Video Documentary Clips**]

As a PWI, the challenge for us is how to engage primarily white students in meaningful dialogues about diversity, even as we work actively to diversify the student and faculty body. *The Mosaic and Crossing Borders* (CB) programs both were designed as innovative models that encourage culturally diverse students to live, work, and study together in multiple contexts both within the United States and abroad.

With a strong record of excellent global education programs, Dickinson was less effective in confronting issues of domestic diversity. In order to focus on inter-cultural education and communication - both across and within nations - Crossing Borders

envisioned a series of crossings: personal, institutional, disciplinary, linguistic, regional, national, and international. It brings together up to 20 students from Dickinson College (a PWI), Xavier University and Spelman College (both HBCUs) to spend four weeks in the summer in Cameroon, West Africa. Students then return to Dickinson College for the fall semester to continue their studies of memory and representation; African diaspora, the Middle Passage, the Great Migration; and race and ethnic relations, and community building in contemporary America. At Dickinson, all of the students take a Crossing Borders course together in addition to three additional courses of their own choosing. In the spring semester, students study either at Spelman or Xavier. Thus, the program works with the intersections of international and domestic diversity as students experience a variety of border crossings, both within their group, between them as Americans and Cameroonians, and then as they return to the PWI and HBCU campuses. As Andrea, a white woman from Dickinson reflected upon her experience:

Throughout this semester, I have been confronted with many concepts and realities that have taken me to the far border of my knowledge and personal experience, and then beyond." I have been forced to think of myself, others, and my country in a much more objective, encompassing and analytical way. But the most difficult part has been sorting out where I come from and.... where I will go.

Interacting Identities

In all three locales, students became much more aware of the interplay between race, class, and culture. They were better able to contemplate how much they had been influenced not only by their own personal and familial backgrounds (something most students are able to articulate from an individualistic perspective), but also by the domestic and international politics of race, class, and gender at the turn of the twenty-first century. They came in Stuart Hall's words, to an understanding of the positions of enunciation - and the ways in which identity is a "'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This view problematizes the very authority and authenticity to which the term, 'cultural identity' lays claim" (Hall, 1990: 222).

Throughout the course, we discussed Du Bois, Trouillot, hooks, and the ways in which historical memory is a site of cultural struggle that continues to be contested. In the process, we examined how dominant and alternative historical narratives have affected our own lives and understandings. We began to deal with contested truths not only within the academic literature "out there" at the macro level, but also at the meso-institutional level, and at the micro level, within the group and ourselves. It was here, of course, that the political became particularly personal as we explored the contested terrains that separated as well as united us.

Confronting Americanness in Cameroon

The broad notion of America has never really included everybody, and all the redefinitions notwithstanding, the inclusive use of "American" remains ambiguous even today (Werner Sollors).

You know, we got the same color, but when it all comes down to it, we're all viewed as American. It's so hard for African-Americans in terms of finding our identity (Aja, African-American student from Xavier).

In the context of Cameroon, all of the students - be they black or white - soon discovered that they were seen as “American.” While this produced no cognitive dissonance for the white students, it did challenge the personal and national identities, and world views, of the African-American students in profound ways.

Before Cameroon, Jamie, an African-American woman from Xavier explained:

I had never, ever **once** in my life thought that I was American. I **never** say that I’m American. Even when I identify myself as African-American, [the] American [part] doesn’t add to it. So when we got there, we’re filling out the forms for the hotels and we’re like, “Nationality” - what do we put here? I have never, ever felt like I felt when I put American down, because I was just like - “What is going on here?” I was just - I’m still, I’m still just like, on this, emotional confusion ride, I don’t know what it is... but I’ve never in my life thought I was American.

Val, an African-American woman from Dickinson echoed Jamie’s thoughts:

I remember when we were signing ID papers when we registered for a hotel room and there was a part that was like, “Nationality”, and I’m like - “Okay”... I turned to somebody, I’m not sure who I turned to, but - I asked them, I was like, “Okay, well... Are we black, or - are we black American, or are we Americans, or - do we say African-American, or do we say ‘African...kind of?’” [laughter]

“I just left it blank,” laughed Steve, as he listened to other African-American students tell of their similar reactions. He too had never felt like an American before Cameroon, nor does he now, although he knows that by some definitions he is one.

As an African-American, a black American, a black American male - however you want to put it - going to Cameroon and having that, you know, reality check that - “Yes, you are an American.” And then you come back to America and you’re like, “I don’t feel like I’m an American. I - I just don’t. I don’t feel like I’m an American.”

The experience for Tandra, an African-American student from Spelman, was both similar and different. Being in Cameroon helped her to acknowledge her Americanness which also came with a recognition of material privilege.

It kinda helped me to see that - I am American. And I guess, growing up in America, growin’ up in Georgia, growin’ up in the South, and I mean in the South... it’s kinda like, “Yeah, well y’all don’t even think I’m American, you think I’m black first, you know, I’m Southern... After 9-11, you know, people were wavin’ American flags, and I was like, “Whatever! Don’t wave an American flag because, on the one side you wave an American flag, on another side you wave a Confederate flag”... You know, under that American flag, black men were lynched, you know, black women raped. How dare you try wavin’ an American flag now and say, “We’re a good nation”, you know, “we’re a peaceful nation”. And we don’t even know what you’re doin’ under the tables and on foreign soil. But - [laughter] Once I got in Cameroon it was like - I guess it was the fact that the Cameroonians knew I was American, there was no doubt about it. “You - American” [laughter]. I don’t know as you’d call them privileges, but because of some of the amenities that I have in America. I realized that I am American. I’m still messin’ with certain issues, like, “okay, they say I’m rich, but I ain’t rich, I’m not rich! You know, I’m not - wait a minute, wait, I’m not rich!”, you know [laughs]. But then days later, you’re still reflecting on (it): “Hey, wait - I am rich.” You know?

I mean, just the fact of the exchange rate made you rich over there. Just the fact (that) certain things that you have over here, you don’t have to worry about photocopying textbooks, you don’t have to worry about pencils, paper, clothes, and... anything like that. Some of that stuff’s just a **given**.

Marc, an African-American history major from Xavier was also surprised.

I thought I would go there and everything would be cool, but it was a big difference. I’ll say it, I never thought I was American. I don’t know too many African-Americans who do... I could probably count the number of black people I know who have a flag, and who are proud to be an American, even **after** 9-11. And it’s just like, you know,

that's never been a part of who I've been... you're kinda raised on bein' more suspicious than faithful to your country. And so it's just a big difference – when people are like, “Hey, American.” You're like, “Wait a minute, you know...” [laughs]

Aja Owens, an African American Communications Major from Xavier University commented that “her whole American side” was realized in Cameroon. The challenge for came directly in her conversations with two Cameroonian students, Blossom and Linda.

We were talkin', and Linda was very opinionated about how she felt about black Americans: “You are not African-American. You are American, and you should make America accept you because that's what you are” – you know, “You were born in America. Why do black Americans always want to associate themselves as being African-American? You're not **from** Africa.”

As Aja is recalling this, she remembers that even the African friends she had at school before she went to Cameroon always made her feel like they had access to Africa because they are *from* Africa. “But,” she exclaims:

I am not from Africa. So Linda's whole take was, how dare I claim, or how dare black people claim “**African**”- American, like, how can they do that? They are American... It was really difficult for me to take..

Aja described herself as having been a promoter of Africa as the motherland and of pan-Africanism, something that Jennifer Landau and David Chioni Moore also had found characteristic of African-American students studying in Ghana (2001). Aja explains:

When I was younger I was really militant. And you know, going to Cameroon, I just saw myself as goin' back home [laughter].... But here was my sister - telling me I wasn't African-anything, that I wasn't even black - and I was like, “Oh my God, you know, you're supposed to be my sister; we all are sisters, you know, how can you say something like that?”

Aja's sense of her cultural identity as an *African-American* was shaken and then redefined in relationship to both the Cameroonian and American white students with whom she was interacting. Rather than seeing “cultural identity” as one shared culture and ancestry that is stable and unchanging, with “continuous frames of reference and meaning,” she came to see it as much more complex. Along with other students, she came to appreciate her cultural identity as reflecting common historical experiences with other black peoples who had suffered discrimination and displacement as part of the forced African diaspora that created rifts of separation, dispersal, and fragmentation. But she also came to realize that Africa did not stay the same - it too was transformed. As Stuart Hall eloquently puts it, while there are:

Many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute ‘what we really are’; or rather - since history has intervened - what we have become’.

The major turning point came for Aja when the other Cameroonian student, Blossom, went on to explain more about the complexity and multiplicity of African identities as she experienced them:

Blossom, had more of a sensitive approach in explaining that concept to me. She was tryin' to explain, like, “Okay, you know, black people, they always want to come back to Africa, to so-call ‘find their roots’.” And she was saying that, “Okay. Let's take Cameroon for example.” It's important for African-Americans [to know that Africa], is not the country, it's the continent Cameroon is just one country in Africa - and yes, well I'm from Cameroon. **But** – I'm from Bamenda in Cameroon. And that's the northwestern province. And in Bamenda, I'm from the Bali village, and I speak this language in this village...” And she just continued. “There are so many breakdowns in my own country, you know, how do you expect to come here from America, and you

haven't been here in I don't know **how** long,. And how do you expect to come to Africa and find one place where you fit or you belong? What is 'welcome back?' You never left, who are you?" I don't understand how we can start to approach that whole concept of finding our identity because... like Linda said, where would we go? I appreciated her for bein' real.

The reality that there was not a fixed place to return to, no point of Original Return, became painfully clear. Yet, it is also the case, that this sense of connection is real, and not just a mere phantasm either. Cameroon was a major center of the centuries-long trans-Atlantic slave trade which radically transformed America. Today, millions of Americans have a partial - and almost always unspecifiable - African ancestry. So as Hall argues, "there is *something* (here) - not a mere trick of the imagination" (Hall, 1990:226). Such yearnings and felt connections come out of a history of being torn away, of disconnection - they too have a history.

Cultural identities are the point of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning (Hall 1990:226).

Global Mosaic

Such understandings and positionings of multiple identities were a central part of the comparative study of trans-Atlantic migration and the collection of oral histories in Steelton, Pennsylvania and Patagonia, Argentina. The Global Mosaic represents another curricular innovation that engaged students in the classroom, the community, and a reflexive exploration of themselves as well as "the other." Today, we will present some of the findings from the oral histories collected in the oil company towns of Patagonia.

Since 1907, when petroleum was discovered near the small port of Comodoro Rivadavia, on the sparsely populated coast of central Patagonia, company towns were developed by the Argentine state and foreign companies to employ and house workers. The oil fields and the economic activities that emerged around them (services, commerce, agriculture) drew a diverse labor force from Italy, Spain, Portugal, Bulgaria, Russia, Poland, the former Yugoslavia, Greece, South Africa (Boers), Germany, and Chile, as well as internal migrants from northern Argentina. As these immigrant groups settled in the company towns and in Comodoro Rivadavia, they developed mutual aid societies, labor organizations, and religious and social organizations.

These developments and the growth of the Comodoro region were linked to larger processes of international and internal migration, urbanization, industrialization, labor organization, and community formation which took place in the larger trans-Atlantic space during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Similar communities emerged in other regions of Argentina, Canada, Brazil, and the United States. [Video Documentary Clips] We were interested in exploring how these different groups created and negotiated their identities in this multi-ethnic context. How did they perceive themselves and others? And how did national and international developments affect their negotiation of collective identities among specific ethnic groups in these regions?

Working in small teams, students and faculty conducted multi-generational oral histories with retired and current oil and steelworkers and family members from various immigrant, class, and religious groups. From the macro to micro level, we are interested in examining the history of labor and ethnic relations in the multi-ethnic oil

company towns of Patagonia and steel company towns of Pennsylvania. Both Steelton and Comodoro Rivadavia represent multi-ethnic societies formed by the influx of immigrants from Europe. Different national groups created ethnic organizations such as clubs and mutual aid societies. Questions: How did these different groups create and negotiate their identities in this multi-ethnic context? How do they perceive themselves and others? How are they represented in various company documents, newspaper articles, association reports? How do the experiences of internal migrants (“peasants” from NW Argentina and African-Americans from the US South who moved North to Steelton as part of the Great Migration) compare and contrast? A major focus will be on the negotiation of collective identity among specific ethnic groups in these regions, and how these negotiations are influenced by national and international developments.

Steelton, Pennsylvania, like Comodoro offers a case study that reveals both unique aspects of its history and development, and a comparative study of intra- and trans-Atlantic migration; the reorganization of work, family, and community; and the negotiation of multi-ethnic conflict and cooperation. Home to the first steel mill dedicated exclusively to the process of making steel, Steelton was established in 1866. It too drew a diverse, immigrant workforce from England, Ireland, Germany, Italy, Eastern Europe, and Mexico during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A significant Black population migrated from the southern United States during this period as well. Job categories in the mill, residential neighborhoods, and churches were distinguished by race, ethnic group, and class. Today Steelton numbers some 6,000 residents with 33 self-identified ethnic and racial groups.

Both Steelton and Comodoro Rivadavia represent multi-ethnic societies formed by the influx of immigrants from Europe. Different national groups created ethnic organizations such as clubs and mutual aid societies. How did these different groups create and negotiate their identities in this multi-ethnic context? How do they perceive themselves and others? How are they represented in various company documents, newspaper articles, association reports? How do the experiences of internal migrants from the North West of Argentina and African-Americans from the US South compare and contrast? The study examines the negotiation of collective identities among specific ethnic groups in these regions, and how these negotiations are influenced by national and international developments. This paper will focus on the oral histories collected in Patagonia and the ways in which they enrich our understandings of the history of the region, ethnic-labor relations, and the negotiation of multiple identities.

Methods and Sample

In January 2001 and again in January 2003 we took a group of students to Patagonia to conduct vide-taped oral history interviews and analyze archival materials. As part of the experience, students lived with families who were associated with the Federation of Mutual Aid Societies. They were able to interview members of those families as well as individuals who had lived and worked in the oil company towns, scan photographs and documents, and piece together more of the history of the area. To date, we have conducted over 60 interviews, approximately one-third of which have been transcribed and translated into both Spanish and English; a few have also been transcribed into German and Portuguese.

Multiple Identities

The people of Comodoro Rivadavia and the surrounding company towns developed a multifaceted identity based on their roles as workers related directly or indirectly to the oil industry, as well as settlers and pioneers on the sparsely populated coast of central Patagonia. Immigrants here were not received by an old, established "host society" as was the case in Steelton; rather they were responsible for building up a new society around the oil fields. The peculiar labor conditions of the oil company towns, characterized by a high turnover of workers and a high ratio of men to women, contributed to the nature of a community in flux, and of people continually re-negotiating their identities based on their experiences as immigrants and workers around ethnic, national, class, and gender lines.

Ever since it was discovered in 1907, oil has dominated the economy and society of Comodoro and influenced the population's identity. This was particularly true for the workers and their families who lived in the respective company towns, "owned" and developed by the Germans (Astra), "YPF" (the Argentine State), Dutch Royal Shell, and British Petroleum. The company towns built by the different oil companies provided more than working and living spaces; they also gave the workers and their families a sense of belonging and identity. Oil companies fostered this as a way to minimize conflicts and increase social control through a variety of means: management of race and ethnicity; construction of social and communal spaces of interaction, housing, codes of conduct, company-sponsored recreation and festivities, etc..

In the case of the national company, this sense of identity went along with an attempt to foster citizenship values and "Argentinization." This was the official response to a wave of nativism that appeared in Argentina, as well as in other countries of immigration like the United States in reaction to the rising labor unrest of the first decades of the twentieth century. Beginning in the 1920s, the Argentine state began to recruit native workers from Northwest Argentina to counteract what it saw as European immigrants' radical labor belligerence. The large number of Bulgarian, Russian and other Eastern European workers in the oil fields only increased the fear about a Bolshevik threat in the area. Thus, in an attempt to control labor and social unrest, the State attempted to "Argentinize" the labor force of the national oil company and, at the same time, the local population, the majority of whom were European immigrants. The older workers of European descent sometimes see themselves as the pioneers who tamed the Patagonian desert and contrast their experiences with those of the state-sponsored internal migrants. This has had long-lasting effects in people's perceptions of self and other.

Pioneers: Building a New Society in Central Patagonia

Prior to the discovery of oil in 1907, the primary socioeconomic existence of the town relied on its status as a shipping port for agricultural and livestock products from the surrounding inland areas. An Italian immigrant named Francisco Pietrobelli is commonly proclaimed as the founding figure of the Comodoro Rivadavia when it was nationally recognized in February 1901. At that time, only a small population of some 500 people who had settled in the area. Oil was discovered as they went searching for a source of water for the town.

As Juan Ivanoff explains:

The petroleum wasn't discovered because they knew there was petroleum here, it was a coincidence.... What was still missing for the people that lived here (was water). Comodoro Rivadavia grew a little bit because it was close to the sea and (they needed a way to export) the wool from the sheep from the interior. So they brought... their goods to the port so they would be put on board the boats and taken to Buenos Aires or England or I do not where. But, well it began to get populated. This part of the city, El Centro, people did not have water. There was no water because the one from the sea can not be drunk because it is salted and so they were doing a hole to see if they could find some water and in doing that hole, something started to come out... something was coming out like it was oil or gasoline and they said what is this? They didn't know. It was investigated by other technicians and they said this is petroleum. And like that, petroleum was discovered here.

At first, there were no other companies. Only YPF existed... it was there that the first deep hole that gave petroleum to Argentina was drilled, there was no petroleum anywhere else, and the one that discovered it was YPF (Yacimientos Petroliferos Fiscales).

After this, Comodoro Rivadavia became much more than a trading port. National and private oil companies and towns sprang up as a result of oil production. Pumping oil out of the ground required both skilled and unskilled labor, and as oil production increased and the indigenous labor resources diminished, the country looked toward migration to bolster their labor needs. In a 1905 census of Comodoro Rivadavia, 94 percent of adult inhabitants were of foreign origin. The population was small in the early years of Comodoro's existence and would continue to grow only slightly until the oil and labor boom in the 1920's. In 1917, the area of Comodoro held 3,232 inhabitants (1,300 in the town, 1,932 in the oil company towns); three years later, in 1920, a regional census reported 2,179 residences in Comodoro and 2,219 in the company towns. By 1930, however, the total population figure of the area was more than 10,000 inhabitants, and in 1944, Comodoro Rivadavia alone had 10,741 people. Migration was the primary reason behind the growth in population over a short period of time.

Considering this, it is no wonder that many of the early migrant laborers saw themselves as pioneers. This was certainly the case for 98 year old Petko Nikov who came to C.R. in 1930, and his 80 year old daughter Ivanka Petkova (de Stancheff) who followed 7 years later with her mother and brother in 1937. Ivanka recalls her first impressions upon arrival:

When we got here, the ship docked far out at sea....We looked, with my Mom and my brother, and said, This is America? There was nothing.

Both Ganio Kanoff, a Bulgarian immigrant and Maria Mendoca, a Portugese immigrant also arrived in Comodoro in 1937 as 10 year olds. In her interview, Maria Mendoca expressed disillusionment after the glittering lights that had welcomed her to Comodoro were gone and the daylight revealed a different reality:

We arrived at night (by boat). When we arrived, we saw the lights and we were happy. How beautiful is Comodoro! In the morning, we got up early and we saw a deception. Then my father took us to a (oil) camp. There was nobody. No girls. Nothing.... There was only one family - ours and 6 or 7 men who were working. But families, only ours. We were four years alone. This was the end of the world.

Likewise, Maria Minkova, an 87 year old woman who still runs marathons, recounted her first impressions as an 18 year old Bulgarian girl upon arriving in Comodoro in 1938:

When we arrived by boat at night, we saw all the lights and I thought, "how beautiful!" But when we awoke the next morning, and looked out, all we saw was sand. Nothing but sand.

This perception of being pioneers persisted, even for those who arrived many decades later to what had become the largest urban center in Patagonia..

Luzia Dias, a Portuguese immigrant, arrived in 1963 after marrying her husband by proxy, expecting to find the green pampas of Argentina:

I thought there were very green fields, very green, that everything was very green because of the cows, that everything was green. And I arrived and I found short, stubby fields that were dry fields. Normally it didn't rain. I saw nothing green. It was dry. I became a bit disillusioned because I saw dry fields and dead cows on the side of the road....Well, then I got used to it. One gets used to everything....the only thing I never got used to was to the wind of Patagonia.

The dry landscape of central Patagonia made it clear that this might be a land of opportunities for migrant laborers and their families but it was not going to be a “bed of roses: - either metaphorically or literally.

Juan Ivanoff reflects on this when speaking of his parents' experience. His father, a shepherd in Bulgaria, came to Comodoro in 1931 to join his brother who was already working in the oil fields. Juan's father then worked for 6 years for YPF and saved enough money to bring his wife and son in 1937. They arrived in September 1937 and then Juan was born in Comodoro in April 1939.

If today, Comodoro is dry and does not have much green, 60 years ago this was very ugly, eh? There was no pavement, the streets were dirt [referring to the downtown] this was countryside, there were loose animals here, there was a cow that gave milk, but there was no life around here. It started to grow because of petroleum but this hill (was) difficult; now it has pavement but when it was made out of dirt and it rained it was muddy, you couldn't walk, it was difficult, life was very hard and I think that the one that (had the hardest time) was my mother because Bulgaria, even though it is a very poor country, it had a lot of green and is very beautiful, it has a lot of flowers, a lot vegetation. What happened is that it does not have a lot of food. Well, you have to go out and look for your well-being in some way.

Labor Experience and Identity

From a population of 312 in 1905 to more than 75,000 in 2001, Comodoro Rivadavia is a town grounded in the immigrant experience as a function of its economic development. Comodoro Rivadavia was the center of an industrial and mining area which developed under the impulse of petroleum production. Until the complete privatization of the oil industry in the early nineties, every aspect of life in Comodoro was dominated by the oil industry in the town of Comodoro itself and the outlying company towns of the oil industries. This was particularly true for the workers and their families who lived in the respective company towns, “owned” and developed by the Argentine State (YPF), Germans (Astra), Dutch (Royal Shell, Diadema), and British Petroleum (Petroquímica). The company towns built by the different oil companies provided more than working and living spaces; they also gave the workers and their families a sense of belonging and identity.

The peculiar labor conditions of the oil company towns, characterized by a high turnover of workers and a high ratio of men to women, contributed to the nature of a community in flux. Migrant workers made up the overwhelming majority of this labor force.

Martha Ebbeling Jung, born on the 12th of December, 1912 was the first child born in Astra, the German-owned and run oil company town. Even as a young child,

Martha remembers that there were not enough people to work the various shifts to keep the oil flowing.

There was nobody. Where would the people come from? Down here, at Astra, as well as at Kilometer 3, there were almost all foreigners who worked there. And very often they could not stand the [cold] climate and went back again. [The men] worked in shifts at the drillings because they never had enough people, so they most of the time they worked 12 hours. And Sundays they worked eighteen hours so that someone could have a day off.

In the early days, drilling was a labor-intensive activity. Many men were needed to build drill the wells, build the towers, and work in the wells. Juan Ivanoff recalls the way drilling was done when his father came from Bulgaria in the early 1930s:

The tower is the structure that is used to make the well and look for oil. In that time, it was made out of wood, there were no metal towers and there were no big equipments like machines. They would make the well, they would get together 4 , 5, or 10 people and with sticks they would start walking in a circle until they make a drill. ... So when a foreigner came they first made him get up in the tower, and the tower had steel cables so the wind would not make it fall to the floor. So they would make them go up and they would jump with the cable. It they pass that ... They were strong to work in the petroleum.

The majority of the immigrants entered the new society as oil workers and, more specifically, as workers of particular oil companies. This provided newcomers with other possibilities of identification and belonging. The feeling of belonging to one of the several company towns was reinforced by their daily experiences (company housing; company cafeterias for single workers; etc.) as well as by the official company discourse. The latter is clear in the case of the national oil company (YPF). In the 1930s and 1950s, YPF recreated locally the “welfare state” conditions (and rhetoric) of the Peronist state. This provided with yet another level of identity for YPF migrant workers and their families and the source of differentiation between them, the workers of other companies, and the inhabitants of the town of Comodoro Rivadavia.

Conclusion

We are just beginning to analyze the oral history interviews collected by the faculty-student research teams in Steelton, Pennsylvania and Comodoro Rivadavia, Argentina. But the gains from these programs have already been realized in the kinds of engagement the students have had with members of other communities and the quality of work they have produced (see www.dickinson.edu/departments/amos). These opportunities to become involved in community life, to do empirical research, to listen to others’ stories as well as discover their own as part of the process, have made students’ border crossings all the more meaningful and rich. Far more than diversity serving just as a multi-cultural backdrop, the Mosaic and Crossing Borders programs encourage students to become involved and share deeply in the lives of people who are both different from and similar to themselves. Diversity is not just present, it is experienced and integrated

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Bionote

Susan Rose has written extensively on the growth and impact of evangelicalism in the United States, Guatamale and the Phillipines. Her research examines the interactions among religion, fundamentalisms, gender, violence and human rights. With an interest in facilitating intercultural relations, she has helped develop the Mosaic and Crossing Borders programs at the Dickinson College. Rather than just teaching about diversity, these programs engage diverse groups of students in collaborative fieldwork in communities in the US, Argentina and Cameroon.