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## **Activating Pedagogy: Civics Lessons from Laura Nader's Teaching**

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### **Activating Pedagogy in Civic Life: The Controlling Processes Approach**

Most members of complex societies and certainly most Americans do not know enough about, nor do they know how to cope with, the people, institutions, and organizations which most affect their lives. I believe that anthropologists would be surprisingly good at applying their descriptive and analytical tools to a major problem: How can a citizenry function in a democracy when that citizenry is woefully ignorant of how the society works and doesn't work, of how a citizen can "plug in" as a citizen, of what would happen should citizens begin to exercise rights other than voting as a way to make the "system" work for them?

Laura Nader, "Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained from Studying Up" (1969b)

Laura Nader began teaching at UC Berkeley in 1960 and became the Anthropology Department's first tenured woman. To celebrate her half-century of scholarship and teaching, on April 10, 2012 the Department of Anthropology sponsored an unstructured discussion about "Pedagogy in Civic Life: The Return of Controlling Processes," which capped off the three-day Anthropology in the World symposium honoring the impacts of Nader's scholarship. Held on a sunny Saturday morning in an overflowing auditorium in Kroeber Hall, the open forum was attended by over one hundred former students, colleagues, members of the public, and guests such as Gov. Jerry Brown, Ralph Nader, and Ashraf Ghani. Not a typical Festschrift, it was a lively and inspiring three-hour discussion about pedagogy in civic life.

This paper draws on comments from the Pedagogy in Civic Life forum as well as teaching reviews and letters collected between 2007 and 2010 from Nader's students in "Anthropology of Law," "Controlling Processes," and "Energy, Culture and Society," and [this author's] first person observation as a teaching assistant in the latter two courses.<sup>2</sup> Others have written about the transformative effect of Nader's approaches for the anthropology of law (French 2005) and the anthropology of education (Hamann 2003). In keeping with the subtitle of "Pedagogy in Civic Life: the Return of Controlling Processes," I focus this paper on Controlling Processes, the course which most singularly addresses the opening quote: How can a citizen "plug in" and make the "system" work for him or her? I highlight four priorities in Nader's pedagogy that add up to a response:

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(1) investigative research; (2) clear communication; (3) mentoring; and, (4) mobilizing anthropology by envisioning possibilities.

Laura Nader's theory of Controlling Processes "deals with the means by which people's behavior, actions, and at times, thoughts, are controlled by social and cultural mechanisms, and the means by which people avoid, resist, or invent counter-controls" (Nader 2010a). Nader calls these mechanisms controlling processes, "the study of which is of increasing interest to scholars and laypeople alike because of the intensification of centralized control in the world and the efficiency of that control by means of technology" (2010a). The course examines control through language, science, technology, law, violence, politics, religion, medicine, development, sex and gender, marketing, and media. In the years I participated, it often attracted over two hundred and fifty graduate and undergraduate students from across Berkeley's natural and social sciences, humanities, and professional schools, as well as some members of the public.

In her 1995 Sidney Mintz lecture at Johns Hopkins University (later published in *Current Anthropology*), Nader detailed how a controlling processes approach responds to Mintz's call for an "anthropology of everyday life." It "incorporates the full panoply of key concepts—ideology, hegemony, social and cultural control—in the study of both invisible and visible aspects of power working vertically through ideas and institutions" (1997a:712). Not one-dimensional, it combines ethnographic, historical, and critical research methodologies (711). Nader writes, "Ethnography gets to the heart of control and why it is so difficult to perceive and to study, history connects us to the processes that interact with experience, and the reflexive approach leads us to analytical tools that may themselves be hegemonic or ideologically tainted—for example ideas about control, culture, and the anthropologist on home ground" (711).

Regarding the Anthropology in the World symposium, Laura Nader said to CalTV (2012): "We wanted to call attention to the fact that anthropologists go elsewhere to study, very often, in order to understand the world they live in at home.... Here at Berkeley, kids were really having troubles that they couldn't tell their parents about. The world was changing in the 1960s '70s and '80s, and that was when I decided to start teaching Controlling Processes, which was really the highlight of my undergraduate teaching." Her brother Ralph characterized Controlling Processes as an "approach to real problems as if people matter first," and went on to say that, "She wants anthropology to project into the future." To that end, her anthropological pedagogy is about "liberation approaches... focusing on myths that suppress realities in our country. Anthropology is very good at exposing myths."

Nader structures the course from big picture to micro-processes, such as those bearing on the construction of family and personal life. Two classics of literature open the Controlling Processes course, the novels *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell 1948) and *Brave New World* (Huxley 1932). The books represent two poles of control, direct and indirect, and they are imaginative. Orwell's book describes a world where independent thinking is suppressed by permanent war, overt censorship, torture, and constant surveillance. Huxley's book envisions a world where independent thinking is nearly wiped out through social engineering, the standardizing influences of advertising, the widespread use of happiness drugs, and peer pressure. In addition to these novels, some course readings are taken from non-academic books and journals such as *Harper's* or

*The New Yorker*. Nader also uses a number of ethnographic films and documentaries in class, including some of those she has produced such as *To Make the Balance* (1966), about Zapotec indigenous dispute resolution, and *Losing Knowledge: 50 Years of Change* (Nader and Gonzalez 2010), about the loss of locally-based knowledges in the Rincon Zapotec village of Talea and beyond. Her film *Little Injustices: Laura Nader Looks at the Law* (1980a) has been translated into dozens of languages and seen by literally millions of people. On top of a diverse set of stories and films, assigned novels and ‘non-academic’ articles, Nader invites a number of guest speakers, including authors from outside of academia, distinguished professors from campus, as well as graduate and undergraduate students who are working on relevant topics.

The midterm and final exams are cumulative in content and score. To ensure that each student is competing with him or herself, midterm exam grades are trumped by final exam grades if the latter score is higher. Furthermore, the exams are themselves tools of teaching, rather than punitive traps. Exam questions are written to provoke, and require critical reflection on materials. One question on the final exam explicitly asks for imagination—“Imagine a world...” without advertising, or where efficient mass transit was available, or where you had the power to make decisions on public education.

## Investigation

The teacher who is indeed wise does not bid you to enter the house of her wisdom but rather leads you to the threshold of your mind.

—An adaptation of Khalil Gibran by Seteney Shami.

I don’t believe there are enough words to describe the feeling of empowerment I have from having my eyes finally opened.

—Quote from a teaching review.

Laura Nader’s teaching of anthropology prioritizes engaging and activating anthropological research. Pedagogy emerges as a critical dialogue where students participate in questioning and investigating topics that motivate them out of a sense of purpose, often activating their interest in civic engagement.

Irving Zaretsky, one of Nader’s first students who went on to teach at Princeton and did pioneering research in the anthropology of religion, was drawn into graduate school in 1960 by Nader after finishing a BA in American Studies at Berkeley. “I suppose in all these years, 52 years,” Zaretsky said, “my approach to life and education was very much shaped by Laura in terms of learning to ask the right question. Pedagogy in anthropology is... about how do you pass information from one generation to the next, and how to you get people to open their minds to see the reality that is around them?” Zaretsky said that a key pedagogical issue in anthropology is “how to introduce students to think inductively, to go from data to theory, and not be afraid, if your conclusion differs from your textbook, to disagree and to know why.”

Nader’s scholarship and teaching both advocate for the development of questions and points of view through fieldwork. “Anthropology is grounded in life, not text; the marked absence of civic engagement [in anthropology] in any but abstract

terms is... escapism” (Nader 2001:614). To avoid sectarian abstractions that may lock the researcher into narrow philosophies or “one-dimensional strategies” (1988:149) and discount complementary ways of seeing, Nader argues that the research question should drive the method (155, 157), or theory be applied as needed to address questions. Recognizing ethnography as a theory of description (Nader 2011) puts questions derived from real world observations at the forefront.

In *Controlling Processes*, Nader assigns the students a final term paper asking them to examine the workings of a controlling process in their lives. Not a typical library-research paper, this assignment asks students to analyze control of their own interest, based on their own experiences. Astonishingly, she grades all of these herself, usually nearly three hundred papers, in order to stay informed about issues affecting students’ lives. Such fieldwork has the advantage of replacing abstractions with concrete examples that have meaning for students, transforming the authorial voice from passive to active (Harms 2007). Nader has argued that this kind of research “on home ground,” “studying up, down and sideways” along networks and hierarchies of power, makes for an anthropology that is more democratically relevant and scientifically adequate (1969b, 1997a, 2001).

When I first visited Nader’s office hours as an undergraduate for advice on a final paper topic, she asked me, “What do you get upset about? What makes you angry?” Seth Holmes, a graduate student in 1990s, told a similar story. He went to office hours to ask advice on a dissertation topic. Nader replied, “Go into one of these areas that interests you. You will find something that makes you indignant, and then go study that, try to figure out why that’s going on.” Holmes, a PhD in medical anthropology, now uses controlling processes analysis in sections of his public health courses at Berkeley. One undergraduate student commented on how drawing on experiences and insights as fieldwork data helped her “connect-the-dots,” bridging classroom and real life:

I’m a sophomore at UC Berkeley and have completed numerous courses in all sorts of departments here thus far, however *Controlling Processes* is the only one that has actually made me think. While I’ve spent hours in the library each week memorizing formulas and historical facts, I’ve never had a real opportunity to use my imagination or my own opinions for school. CP has really made me reexamine my life and the world around me... it’s the only course that has made me think about real life and not just formulas. You teach to teach and not to train employees. Thank you very much for that...”

To provoke critical reflections and debate, Nader encourages questions in the classroom. She encourages students as participants to speak up and disagree with her, with others, and to critique ideas and defend positions. In an interview with *California* magazine (Shoch 2000:32), Nader recounts:

I asked a colleague of mine at Santa Cruz, who had just won a teaching award, what he did to deserve that. He said, ‘I seduce.’ And I thought, ‘Oh, now I know what I do. I irritate.’ Because my students, especially freshman, are asleep. And I want to wake them up. No student comes out of my course

without having exercised critical thinking. That's why they say the course has changed their lives. Not because they have a dogma they've picked up from the class, but because they've learned to see the invisible. They've learned to make the invisible visible.

"I was sitting in her graduate class," said Jamie Rowen, one of Nader's advisees at Berkeley Law School, "and she started to push us and started saying things that were a little out there, a little too out there in fact, that I didn't think she could believe. So I raised my hand and said, 'I think you're wrong,' and she said 'Good!' And it was this wonderful moment for me. [I realized that she] is someone who wants me to learn to think for myself." Rowen went to law school with the encouragement that it would be a worthwhile intellectual challenge to enter an environment with ideas she found disagreeable.

Many appreciate being encouraged to think critically through probing questions. One student expressed gratitude for learning how "the process of questioning" takes place in student-teacher dialogue. These three reviews are illustrative:

1. One of my biggest transitions throughout the class was realizing that the class itself is a transition process. At the beginning of the semester I was frustrated with Nader's overarching anecdotes about how we are individualized because every child now has a TV in their own room.... Nonetheless, as the class went on I realized she was trying to teach us about the processes behind these social developments, such as having a TV in your room, and not stating that having a TV in your room is bad in and of itself.

The best phrase to sum up the class for me would definitely be, "Think, it's patriotic." This class... really made me question my education. I realized that most of my life I have been taught to learn, and this class, I feel, really taught me to think. I find myself all the time now watching advertisements and questioning how they lure me in and what "lack" they build on. Never before have I taken a class that unconsciously I apply to my everyday life.

2. She has made me look at things I have looked at daily and actually see them for what they are... This is the reason I came to Berkeley. Not to regurgitate and learn how to repeat information through tests but to think, to learn, to be mindful in debating and sincere in my critique of the way things are.

3. [When I said that Brent Berlin's paper on color terms was boring, you said] "Ah, you found it a boring paper. That reveals there was no dialogue in your reading process. Now write a critique of it." [I learned to] take the necessary step of dialoguing with arguments before lazily discarding them.

....[From our graduate seminars] I remember how you posed questions or made comments that, although they could momentarily paralyze the audience, cleverly moved forward the on-going discussion.

....Your scholarship definitely influenced my work; not only in content but also in the commitment to relentlessly tackle relevant issues for contemporary

society.... You taught me that scholarship goes beyond ideas and research, as the privilege of being a scholar implies a responsibility to society.

Nader's example as a teacher wouldn't be as pronounced if her commitment to teaching stopped at the classroom door. Alison Dundes Renteln recounts her pleasure

to have a chance to be at conferences with her and see how she would pose questions to people... [For example, there was one scholar at a law school conference] who made some outrageously ethnocentric remarks, and nobody in the audience would say anything except Professor Nader, who posed some questions and made clear what the fallacies were in his statements.

This is the shape of critical inquiry where "the field" is all around. Nader also follows up by speaking publicly at local venues, at universities across the country, and to major media. Her record of public talks at a diversity of venues—from the Girl Scouts to the World Bank—is probably among the most extensive in Berkeley Anthropology's history. When I was an undergraduate massive budget cuts and tuition hikes began coming every year to California public schools. Laura Nader gave tremendous time and energy reaching out locally, as well as nationally, such as with *Democracy Now! The War and Peace Report* (2009), where she said with urgency:

If we continue in this direction, there's going to be a two-class system: those who go to college are going to be those who can afford it, and those who don't are going to be the middle class. And a few poor people will get a few scholarships, so they can justify it.... [Public education] is something that people admire our country for! Why are we destroying it? It boggles the mind.... We're not connecting the trillions of dollars for war with the fact that we don't have healthcare for all, and we're now destroying public universities. It's absolutely important to connect the dots.

For some, Nader's approach to anthropological investigation is flummoxing, or plain irritating, at least at the outset. One student memorably and humorously said, for example, "Professor Nader is a great teacher, but she has opinions." One lamented that Nader "sometimes says sensationalistic things to get students riled up," and another said,

I finally felt like I was listening to an anthropologist and not just an ethnographer.... It was refreshing.... After two years at Cal, I've been greatly disappointed that anthropology is becoming more of a profession than a virtue... P.S.: I just wanted to say that while I just stated that I think you're super smart and a great anthropologist, I also largely disagree with some of your perspectives and disliked some of your comments. But I guess I wouldn't have had as good of a time if you hadn't pissed me off.

Of course, Laura Nader doesn't want consensus but debate. Nader's biggest influence is

not her own keen socio-political commentary, but her insistence that students use their own minds and imaginations in conducting ethnographic research that's of relevance to them. Furthermore, since controlling processes are double-edged, Nader often reminds students that they need to decide in their own case how a control may be "good" or "bad." She's also been careful not to have the class listed as a university-wide or departmental requirement, in large part so that those who take the course are doing so out of choice.

Nader's appreciation for critical inquiry and dialogue relates to her studies in the anthropology of law (e.g. 1964, 1965, 1969a, 1980d, 1990, 2002a; Mattei & Nader 2008), a field keenly interested in disputing processes, conflict resolution, and theories of justice and injustice around the world. Her work on harmony ideology (1990) and coercive harmony (e.g. 1996c, 2005) examine forms of pacification that have become hegemonic. Her scholarship in general has emphasized connections, for example relating to children, families, and gender (e.g. 1977, 1980e, 2013), energy (e.g. 1980c, 2004, 2010c), militarism (e.g. 1986, 1997b) and science (e.g. 1996a).

## Communication

As a teacher and scholar, Laura Nader puts great emphasis on communicating clearly, using the power of story-telling, and connecting current events to everyday experiences.

Ashraf Ghani, formerly a visiting Berkeley Anthropology faculty member, noted that from Laura Nader, he learned the degree to which "communication is not the same as writing academically." He noted two imperatives—delivering lessons comprehensibly in class, and being able to take anthropology out into the public sphere with precision and concision. "...I used to get [students at Johns Hopkins] to speak two minutes, five minutes and fifteen minutes, with a stopwatch," Ghani said, noting that they abhorred being timed. "If you can find two minutes on television, that's the equivalent of ten million dollars." Gillian Tett talked similarly about the difficulty many anthropologists have in translating academic style to reach wider audiences.

To get a sense of Nader's style of teaching, take for example, the following excerpt which illustrates her way of using storytelling, invitation of argument and questioning, and adept integration of current events with course readings. To give an example from her 2010 Controlling Processes course, Nader contextualized the assigned book *From Advocacy to Objectivity: A Crisis in the Professionalization of American Social Science, 1865-1905* by Mary O. Furner (1975) before two hundred and fifty students packed into the Haas Business School's main lecture hall, ironically known on campus as the Chevron Auditorium:

You're not just reading about something that was and now isn't. You're reading about today by reading about the 1890s. And many of the things that happened then are happening now: heavy industrialization, new techniques, new technologies—it's your life...

Now I was just reading *US News and World Reports*. Companies are starting to teach frugality. Why? Because we're in a depression—they don't want to call it that. It's called a recession if only your neighbor is out of a job. But if you're also out of a job, it's a depression. So there's a lot that's the same

story, different versions.

When you read Mary Furner's work on *From Advocacy to Objectivity*, don't read it as if it's in the past tense. It's today. Not so long ago, what some called Marxist economists at Harvard en masse didn't get tenure, and the University of Massachusetts hired them all. So the University of Massachusetts economics department is a very different color than the Harvard department. They got sacked, basically.

Now... I was having a conversation with one of my colleagues before this class and I was saying "What is considered radical today?" And I looked at my door, and probably the most radical thing, if you've been to my office, is on a little sign on my door that some undergraduate gave me that says "Think, it's patriotic." That's radical today. God forbid you should have independent thought.

You know, one of the things that strikes me as interesting is binary thinking. The so-called "Left," which doesn't exist in America, thinks that Obama is too far to the right. The so-called "Right" thinks that Obama is too far to the left. So what kind of conversation is that? Knee-jerk. We have to figure out: "What is going on here?" Is Obama president in fact? Or is it a corporatocracy? We'd at least get a conversation going. Argue with me! And then maybe we'll come with some understanding of why it might not be fruitful to take the knee-jerk position in one way or another.

Now, today we're going to talk about the Mary Furner writings. So I want to set it up a bit. I've got a couple headlines here. This just came out in the radical newspaper *The San Francisco Chronicle* and the heading was "Political Timidity Invites the Next Financial Crash...."

Nader then read selections from an article that critically assessed big promises made in presidential campaigns and weak or non-existent follow-ups after a candidate is elected. She pulled out another article, this one from *The Corporate Crime Reporter*, in which interviewed a lawyer studying white-collar crime was interviewed. He noted that 95 percent of criminologists study blue-collar crime while only 5 percent study white-collar crime, such as the use of corporations as weapons of fraud by CEOs. She used these articles to ask why professors tend not to be the ones doing this kind of against-the-grain public-interest work.

After dialoguing with students for several minutes, she told a story about how she came to write "The Phantom Factor: Impacts of the Cold War on Anthropology" (1997) which drew from candid interviews with John Gumperz, Gerald Berreman, John Anderson, Nelson Graburn, Herbert Phillips, Paul Rabinow, Sherry Ortner, Elizabeth Colson and others on the Berkeley faculty in 1994. She read some of these professors' reflections on silencing, censorship, and retribution.

I bet you wouldn't get that description from your professors at Berkeley when they teach you today. Why? Because you don't get personal in a class, though it is personal. What your professors are teaching you is a result of their experiences. But they're not supposed to tell you that, because they're

supposed to be objective and impartial and distanced. But this is interesting! I came to know things about my colleagues that I never knew. And that's important; it's the wider context.

She talked about students getting upset about a March 4, 2010 protest on campus, asking why so many appear to think democracy is rude and out of style. She recounted how for twenty-five years, *Controlling Processes* was considered an aberrant course by the Department and she had to beg for readers and teaching assistants. "Is this related to what I just said about the dissenters?" Nader asked, "Some people really don't believe that dissent is part of what it takes to be a democracy—it's 'rude'."

Several students raised questions and disagreed about her interpretation of the protest, noting that many were upset that their classes were disrupted. A discussion ensued about entitlement. "Me, mine, now—no time perspective," she responds, "I just want them to know that maybe their kids will be able to go to Berkeley some day because that one day their class was disrupted."

Nader then discussed the spread of the distinction between professional and amateur in economics. Furner's book gave the examples of Richard T. Ely and Edward W. Bemis, economics professors who wrote for specialist and popular audiences.

Radical! What were they radical about? They were thinking independent thoughts. They were taking them to the public. Popularizers! But there was a professionalism that entered in that was dramatically different than before the Civil War. The distinction between amateurs and professors.

Popularizers... If you wonder why your professors write the way they do, this will give you some inkling. If you write abstractly, nobody can understand you, they can't attack you! Imagine some Derrida specialist coming before the McCarthy Committee. Will they be able to understand that? So, it's a way of hiding your ideas.

Well, are we at that point in American democracy? We have to hide our ideas? Popularizers? Why do you think the people of the State of California feel so angry—not all of them—about the university professors? They don't know what we do! How many university professors go out and talk to them? I have. Not many in my department can say that. Why? You don't get any points for that. But the people are paying the taxes, they're paying my salary. Right? So, I should go out and talk to them; explain what I do. And sometimes they're a tough audience... so what? It's a challenge. So what? They hear from a university professor, we argue back and forth, eyeball-to-eyeball.

So, popularizers. When I got my first invitation to give a public talk as a young professor, they wanted to know what my honorarium was. I asked my chair, George Foster, "How much should I charge? What should I say?" He said, "I've never given a public talk," and he said it like "Why would you give a public talk?"

This is very deep. Margaret Mead came to speak here. The big auditorium was full. One anthropologist in the whole auditorium! "Why would I go listen to that popularizer?" That was part of her problem too. Everyone in the

room knew who she was and wanted to go hear her talk, but god forbid the Department of Anthropology faculty...

So this is very deep now. But it wasn't always that way.

Professor of anthropology Marianne Ferme, who sat through several Controlling Processes sessions on behalf of UC Berkeley Distinguished Teaching Award council, had these reflections on Nader's lecturing style:

I was struck by the way she could take an item in a newspaper, a recent major event, and make that the centerpiece of an anthropological lecture. It's been a truly inspiring way to move away from what Paulo Freire called the container model of education, in which teachers take things and try to fill students heads as though they were empty boxes, and instead take on a kind of partnership role in conjunction with students in which education really becomes a dialogue.

And here are three perspectives from students:

1. Her method of lecturing is helpful because it exposes the potential of dialogue in teaching. Although she clearly leads the lecture, the inclusion of students' opinions ensures that we are constantly thinking rather than writing useless Powerpoint bullets.
2. Her style shows that a formal hierarchy and method in the classroom is not necessary and that a more story-oriented style can be more engaging for students. It's just more simple to apply a story to life, than a key term.
3. Nader truly helped us think outside the box. She helped me think about our world in ways that no other professor, or person, has ever prompted me to... before. Also, I loved the readings for the course that were not purely academic.. She put a lot of interesting articles in the reader that made me more aware of what's going on in the world.

One PhD student described Nader's method of lecturing as "connecting stories with theory." She wrote:

I remember a class in which you captured us with a story of a village visit in Guatemala. You told details of villager's daily life in an apparently impoverished, yet amazingly beautiful surrounding next to the banks of Lake Atitlán.

As we were engrossed and expecting more details, you began to challenge us: "How do we define poverty? Is it lack of income? Is it lack of voice? How does the quality of life of these villagers in rural Guatemala compare to those of the homeless in People's Park? How does it compare to our lives?" .... "I learned the transformative power of connecting stories with deep theoretical

analysis.

Although classes are conducted in a serious tone, infusions of humor are important as well. Liza Grandia, a 2005 PhD, now Associate Professor of Native American Studies at UC Davis, mentioned one often-told anecdote: “[Laura Nader’s youngest daughter came home from school one day] and said, ‘Mom, they’re calling me an oddball!’ And Laura Nader said, ‘You are an oddball! Your mother’s an oddball, your father’s an oddball, the whole family is an oddball!’” Such stories are one way of giving advice, as are short sayings, “Nader-isms” as Grandia called them: “What’s the opposite of unemployment? Self-employment!” or “Never be in awe of anything (except, perhaps, nature).” Nader has also coined memorable analytical terms such as the notions of *trustanoia* (the opposite of paranoia), *trimtabs* (leveraging techniques), and *apertures* (conjunctural moments of possibility), among others.

### **Mentoring and Apprenticeship**

“Professor Nader treated me like a grown up, so I acted like a grown up”  
—undergraduate student.

Laura Nader’s deep concern for mentoring recognizes that teaching in the classroom can’t be disconnected from a student’s life experiences. Universities are often surprisingly hierarchical environments where support is lacking, little time is given to constructively critiquing student work, and even less to praising quality work. The following graduate student was working on a topic about which he felt indignant but that was difficult to sustain.

To have someone of your accomplishment who exudes such strength tell me that I had something, gave me the strength to continue and remain positive in the most difficult of times. You were also one of the few who encouraged me to pursue my interests in the Palestinian situation when many felt it was unwise.... I was able to hang in there and finish [the PhD] because I was doing something meaningful to me.... I feel very grateful for your support in a department that I feel is not particularly friendly or supportive and where one tends to get marginalized if they do not talk or think a certain way.

Another graduate student recalled Nader’s generosity—invitations to lunch to celebrate accomplishments, dinner parties and correspondence by telephone or letter. “Your mentorship was about high expectations and guidance,” the graduate student wrote, “There was recognition for a job well done just like there was admonishment for underperformance. From day one it was clear to me that only excellent work was acceptable.” This student also appreciated that in hard times, during those long months in Berkeley that were “an experience in solitude,” Nader’s office would always be opened up in times of need. “Your mentorship ensured that I maintained balance,” such as exercising regularly and accepting invitations to dinner: “How I cherished going to dinner at your house, with the good wine, the sumptuous roast of lamb, the smell of

garlic and the stories behind food, and a table set beautifully filled with family members and engrossing discussions.”

The university equivalent of the family dinner table, Nader’s office hours are attended by many students. Office hours are an important mentoring space for countless undergraduates in particular, and on a given day one can expect to find a small line waiting outside her open door. In a letter, this undergraduate conveyed the meaning that mentorship can take on:

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to learn, grow and understand the world I live in. Your class offered me the chance to think critically and pose questions that challenge the system that controls our thoughts, behaviors and lives. I am thankful that you helped me unravel my confused thoughts in office hours and later shared what we discussed in class. You actually listen, remember and care.... It was an honor. One day I hope that I can share my passion, frustration, and love of education to others as you do. Your class turned my life upside down because it made me realize what it is that I want in life, what my future goals are.... But I will have to save that story for next semester’s office hours...

Nader often takes time to read her mail to students, especially research assistants, in office hours—illuminating the life of a scholar. Research assistants for her don’t do her work, but they participate in its formation and learn how professional scholarship gets done. In the spirit of apprenticeship, they learn by doing. Alison Dundes Renteln, whose father was renowned Berkeley folklorist Professor Alan Dundes and who is now a professor at the University of Southern California, told of working for Nader as a young apprentice:

When I was about eleven, I had a chance to do research in her office, about forty years ago. It was for a study for the Carnegie Council on Children.... We went through hundreds of letters written to her brother [Ralph Nader], complaint letters to see how children were involved. So I learned at a young age that research is important, that research can influence the world, that children can do things—you don’t have to wait until you’re a grown up to make a difference—and so that was a thrilling experience and really influenced me for the rest of my life.

Dundes Renteln’s work as an apprentice was the starting point of long-run mentorship:

When I became active in my department and sometimes felt it difficult to criticize colleagues, she would say to me “What’s the matter with you? What’s happened to you? Why don’t you speak out on these things!?” And I learned from her that it’s important to use your voice and speak out... even when you’re pressured not to say things because it will effect your promotions and so forth.

One student comment indicates reciprocity and mutual respect, “Professor Nader treated me like a grown up, so I acted like a grown up,” as well as the following remarks by Joseba Zulaika, Professor in the Center for Basque Studies at the University of Nevada, Reno: “I am not an old student of Laura. I’ve known her since just last year. I came [to Berkeley for Nancy Scheper-Hughes’ class] and we were together at a party for an hour or two, and it looked like we had been friends for ever, and intellectual companions. She treated me like a colleague and like an equal.”

Egalitarian alternatives that emphasize mutual respect have been of interest to Nader in her scholarship as well as teaching. In her contribution to the memorial volume *Edward Said: A Legacy of Emancipation and Representation* (2010) titled “Side by Side: the Other is not Mute,” she wrote approvingly of figures such as Edward Said and Rifa’ah Al-Tahtawi whose works opposed “the Western cultural imagination that inspired Europeans to extend their rule across the globe” (2010:72). They embodied an “oppositional strain” that emphasized coexistence and mutual respect, “a manner of engagement that runs side-by-side or eye-to-eye and refuses hierarchy, recognizing human beings as equal but malleable and therefore capable of difference” (72). See also *Culture and Dignity: Dialogues between the Middle East and the West* (2013).

Ferme mentioned how co-publishing and collaboration with students has been an unusual marker of Nader’s scholarship: “Many of you have spent a lot of hours in this department working with Laura,” said Ferme, “not under her or not being taught by her, but doing research that became part of her published work and where you’ve been recognized in those worlds as respected intellectual partners.” Michael J. Lowy, a 1971 PhD in anthropology, said of Nader’s Comparative Village Law Project: “She organized a group of scholars to work collaboratively and cooperatively rather than be at each other’s throats... We learned from each other under Laura’s guidance.” She has edited four volumes of controlling processes research by undergraduates and graduates (1994, 1996b, 2002b, 2005) and two such volumes on law (1980d). She has also co-authored a striking number of articles with junior scholars (Nader et al 2010; Nader et al 1995, 1999; Nader et al 1966; Nader and Beckerman 1978; Nader and Combs-Schilling 1976; Nader and Gonzalez 1997, 2000, 2001, 2008; Nader and Grande 2002; Nader and Hertz 2005; Nader and Ou 1998; Nader and Parnell 1983; Nader and Plowman 1996; Nader and Renteln 2010; Nader and Shugart 1980; Nader and Starr 1973; Nader and Sursock 1986; Nader and Whiteside 2001; Nader and Yngvesson 1974). Some of her most influential articles, such as *Up the Anthropologist* (1969b), *Post-Interpretive Anthropology* (1988), and *Controlling Processes* (1997a) illustrate how seriously Laura Nader considers students to be colleagues. Rather than citing whatever theorist is trendy, in these articles she illustrates with profiles of and excerpts from original student research. She makes a point of citing the work of creative students.

## **Mobilization**

I’m so appreciative of the way she has taught me to approach issues by taking nothing at face value and to always be comfortable dissenting. Whatever may happen in the future, I know I won’t take it lying down! —undergraduate student.

Thank you for sharing your knowledge and inspiring me to have hope and take what action I can (rather than to only critique and despair). —undergraduate student.

[W]hat would happen should citizens begin to exercise rights other than voting as a way to make the “system” work for them? —Laura Nader (1969:294).

“I’ve always been struck,” said Professor Mariane Ferme, “by the way that Laura has been able to mobilize students’ enthusiasm.” That energizing phenomenon is at first personal, transforming how students write. Erik Harms (2007) described activation of student’s sense of purpose in a writing course he taught at Duke University using a controlling processes approach.

In contrast to recent academic trends that prioritize abstract theoretical reflection, student research into controlling processes prioritizes ethnography and builds a critical anthropology that directly engages with the “real world” (2007:1)... In the spirit of Zora Neale Hurston, they avidly refine the spy-glass of anthropology; and in the spirit of Laura Nader, they become quite passionate about anthropology when it makes their critical “antennae go up” (5)

Before doing their own research on control, students’ writings about anthropological concepts, mimicking the high theory of authors they’ve read, slip into generalizations and passive constructions full of nominalizations. “The difference has less to do with whether they know how to write than with whether or not they know what they are writing about” (Harms 2007:6). “[T]hey represent not so much novice writing... as a failure to engage with real examples from the real world” (5). After doing research of interest on a topic of control, the passive voice and generalizations are

replaced by grounded reflections written in the active voice... Reality displaces abstraction, and their papers develop a sense of purpose. Informed by anthropological theory but driven by the will to unmask actual processes of control and domination in the real world, student work becomes incisive, direct, theoretically savvy, yet grounded in concrete examples (5)

Harms concludes with observations about lessons for professional anthropology, to “fear not the real.”

Developing a sense of purpose, the personal transformation, is key to activation as a researcher and a citizen. This student found grounding after years of trouble:

What did this class mean for me? Well, it has meant that I have learned, at last, to have more faith in myself. Control was a major issue in my family... Parental mistakes were covered, literally, with accusations of insanity... [Violence in the home but]... My mother would tell me that I was crazy... [M]y uncertainty translated into general insecurity about my thoughts,

perceptions and beliefs.... [A] psychiatrist ignored the truth and medicalized my depression. That is my personal experience with the controlling processes of professions.... The majority of elements in this class are things I have questioned my whole life.... [but] I faced a world of people who didn't want to dig deeper, didn't care, or have the ability to look more closely at the ideas I expressed. This only deepened my sense of separation and difference, and thus a feeling of insanity.... Even after moving several times... I still doubted myself.... My continued cognitive dissonance, in family, in school, in work, was a result of highly structured environments that left little room for self, innovation or creativity or any depth, and therefore any wellness....

I can honestly say nothing about you class has been unproductive for me. It has addressed many of the questions I have asked myself over the decades of my life, it has provided me with a structure to begin building upon to further "make my case" in the future, and it has helped me to believe a lot more in myself and the things I accept as true. In short, this class has provided, on many levels, a lot of healing.

I have greatly enjoyed this class and have gratitude for your time, efforts, wisdom, endurance and the teaching.... Invaluable.

This was from a distinguished student at Berkeley who went on to graduate with the highest of honors. Connecting personal and political (Zaretsky 1976), biography and history (C.W. Mills, 1959), activation for such students means social self-knowledge (Reich, 1995). But how may social self-knowledge be turned into broader action? Liza Grandia, who taught a version of Controlling Processes at Clark University for five semesters, gave several examples:

I get from tons of students on their reviews that they've learned to be oddballs, and the power of being eclectic. What I learned as a graduate student, and for which I'm immensely grateful, is that you taught me to lose my -isms: feminism, conservatism, marxism—why wait for the revolution when there are a multitude of alternatives in the here and now? So for some students... they're ready to undertake a political project... and others simply begin to appreciate that the personal is political and decide to have a dinner party once a week to talk about ideas, or to turn off their Facebook page. And that is the first step in our very complicated world, connecting personal freedoms with civic freedoms.

Ugo Mattei, Professor at the University of Turin and UC Hastings Law School, and co-author with Laura Nader of *Plunder: When the Rule of Law is Illegal* (Mattei & Nader 2008), discussed tempering depressive realities with civic engagement and optimism. In the years after writing *Plunder*, Mattei organized a movement that successfully cancelled water privatization plans in Italy.

It is always important to point to possible solutions to problems. And possibly also to point at solutions that give a role to your life and your role and your

experience right here and now. Not something that makes you wait for the long term, that makes you wait for some sort of messiah to fix the world, but that allows your own work and your own activity—both in theory and in practice—to be already the building of a better world. To be already the making of something you believe in, and it's worth spending time in your life to pursue it. Thanks to Laura, I've finally been able to have the courage and the strength of criticizing frontally a tool [the rule of law] that most people take to be a good idea without knowing its historical and political pedigree....

When we were writing this book, Laura was always reminding me of the fact that we should not be afraid of telling the truth, but also that we should never get depressed by the truth. This to me is really the most important vision that the critical work of Laura has been conveying to me in my philosophy as a scholar, but also as my philosophy of life. There is this very fundamental activism, I would say, in Laura's approach. She's very hard in her critique. She is not afraid of telling the truth. She's not hiding behind hypocrisy in any way. But on the other hand, all of the horrible things that one ends up discovering when doing anthropological work, are never enough to discourage her from having a hope for the future and a vision of transformation.

Activating a sense of possibilities connects with an anthropology that is grounded in life, one that is not just a discipline but a vision.

### **Conclusion: Imagine a World...**

Recently, I attended a discussion about "The Disadvantages of an Elite Education" with author William Deresciewicz (2008) and forty Yale undergraduates. The author pointed out cultural controls such as student entitlement, mediocrity, confusion of test scores with intelligence, the university's prioritization of ethnic over economic diversity, and profitable careers over teaching students to think critically. Many students in attendance showed utter confusion and some accused the author of being delusional. One student in disbelief argued that outside of elite schools it's nearly impossible to find people that are self-reflective. Several students expressed denial that inequality is a significant problem in this country. Several reported they don't believe education should be about citizenship in a democracy, since "education is the best it's ever been right now, and just look at the low levels of public involvement." It was a stinging reminder of how many years most students go through school without pedagogy like a controlling processes approach that teaches them to be specific, confront myths, and work towards social self-knowledge.

Against these disconcerting trends in higher education, the voices of faculty, students, and alumni of Laura Nader's courses show how anthropology can help people plug in as citizens. Nader's approach puts ethnography on the front burner, allowing students to develop research with a sense of purpose and engage in critical dialogue. She uses a variety of means to get anthropological findings across to a wide-ranging audience, including an unsettling forthrightness. Mentorship plays a crucial role in encouraging excellent work and bridging the university and home ground. Mobilization

entails a synthesis of theory and practice and a vision of anthropology as illuminating of real-world possibilities. Keeping “your antennas up” means not allowing sociocultural phenomena to pass by without inquiry.

As the commentaries illustrate, many found Controlling Processes to be a life transformative course. Some have said it should be a breadth requirement for B.A. degrees. Some have opined that one shouldn’t be allowed to take the course until the senior year, “it’s just too much.” Some others have said it should be required for all freshman. I doubt Laura Nader would entertain any of these, particularly because she wishes the controlling processes approach to have a wide-angle scope, to adapt with the times, and to be challenging, not for it to become a recipe or program. Some have criticized the Controlling Processes course for lacking “structure,” in the sense of being too open to the student’s ethnographic interpretation without enough attention to theory. But the two aren’t mutually exclusive and the question really is what kind of theory and for whom. Nader’s preference for keeping ethnography at the forefront helps anthropology stay rooted in the world. It helps maintain the “epistemological curiosity” that Paulo Freire insisted worked to keep “liberation approaches” from becoming recipe approaches that fail to liberate precisely because they lose sight of students’ lived experiences (Freire and Macedo 1995:379).

As a beneficiary of her unique style of mentorship, for me the most remarkable thing about Laura Nader’s pedagogy, as noted by Ferme, is that it teaches students to ask their own questions that connect them with their personal and collective possibilities. In studying control, one learns not only how control works but about possibilities for empowerment. “The course I teach on controlling processes liberates some,” Nader (1997a:735) wrote, “One student said ‘At least I know what I’m up against.’ She had learned how to put the system in reverse. From this angle, how the powerless become empowered is not so different from how the powerful got their power. What is different is the leveraging potential...”

Empowerment involves the teacher’s guidance, but it depends on the student. Nader’s words at the end of the “Pedagogy in Civic Life” forum of Anthropology in the World are an apt summary:

Well this has been a wonderful experience for me. You know, a person can extend the hand but if there’s nobody to take the hand, then it doesn’t matter if you extend the hand or not. I don’t take any credit. I extended the hand but you took the hand....

I’ve heard over and over in the last several hours that you felt liberated from the silencing. And I remember asking the class. I’d say something and they’d say, “Well thank you, people told me ‘I shouldn’t say things like that’ or ‘I shouldn’t open my mouth’.” About the most mundane things! And that is one of the strengths of anthropology....

When the NIMH withdrew funds for anthropology almost completely at one point, and we were highly dependent on them, a bunch of us went to Washington to talk to the executives at the NIMH. We would ask them a question and they would say blah blah blah. We’d ask another question and we’d hear blah blah blah. Finally, Roy Andrade looked at the head-honcho

and he said, “Let me ask you an anthropological question—‘What’s going on around here?’” [laughter]. So keep asking that! What’s going on around here?

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank Laura Nader, Erik Harms, Liza Grandia, Roberto Gonzalez, Drew Kordik, Sean Cox and others who have commented on and improved this article.

<sup>2</sup> To protect confidentiality, I removed the names of the authors of teaching reviews and letters, but do provide the names of those who spoke at the public, and video-broadcasted, Pedagogy in Civic Life forum. All of the Anthropology in the World videos are available on the internet at <http://www.youtube.com/user/berkeleyanthropology>.

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