

Engaging Contradictions

Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship

Edited by

CHARLES R. HALE



Global, Area, and International Archive
University of California Press

BERKELEY LOS ANGELES LONDON

Introduction to Action Research. Thousand Oaks, CA:

and Communicative Action.

nity of Theory and Practice thesis. Washington, DC:

go, University of Chicago

-Brantley. 1998. *The Women* 1930. New York: McGraw-

: From Social Activism to y Press.

: *McCarthyism and the FBI's* am: Duke University Press. olars Program: Cultivating ' *Journal of Higher Educa-*

2).
ial Sciences in Britain. " tml. Accessed May 9, 2007. of Nature. Princeton:

cial Science. Cambridge:

199. *The Ethnographer's* ess.

1: Sol Tax and the World ' *In Excluded Ancestors, In-* : Madison, University of

5. *Beyond Theory*. Philadel-

of Comparative Education u.edu.tw/teach/messboard

13. FAQs

Frequently (Un)Asked Questions about Being a Scholar Activist

Laura Pulido

Dear Potential Scholar Activist,

I am taking this opportunity to write an open letter to all those contemplating or in the early stages of an academic career and wondering if and how they can negotiate the seemingly disparate demands of political engagement and academic performance. I decided to do so because I am routinely asked—generally by activist graduate students whom I don't know—about how I reconcile the two. To be perfectly frank, I rarely know how to respond. I often answer in generalities, such as “You need to follow your heart,” which, while certainly true, does not begin to address the complexities involved. Accordingly, I thought I would use this chapter to answer some of the most frequently asked questions that I receive, as well as some questions that I am not asked but that any person considering becoming a scholar activist would do well to consider.

Before I get into the substance of the letter, I will share a bit about myself, since most of you have never met me and some background will hopefully provide a context for my comments. I am a professor at an aspiring research university in Los Angeles, the University of Southern California (USC). I have a joint appointment in geography and American studies and ethnicity, and most of my research centers on questions of race, political activism, social movements, Chicano/Latino studies, and environmental justice. I identify as a Chicana and native Angeleno—facts that shape a good deal of who I am as a scholar, activist, and human being. While I have always had strong political views, it was not until I entered graduate school in the 1980s that I became politically active. The impetus to get involved stemmed from several sources, including my eagerness to

understand how people transform the world, as well as my own commitment to antiracism, workers' rights, and anticapitalist politics. I do not recall when I realized that I needed to *both* study political activism and be politically active myself, but that notion has been a central part of who I have been since graduate school.

Needless to say, there are many different ways to pursue oppositional scholarship and politics. The form of my own practice and the focus of this letter is what Ruth Wilson Gilmore (1993, 73) calls "organic praxis." Gilmore has identified several tendencies among oppositional scholars, including individual careerism, romantic particularism, luxury production, and organic praxis. Both individual careerism and luxury production emphasize theory production at the cost of disconnection from larger movements for social change. There is nothing wrong with such work, and its practitioners have made many contributions to our understanding of how the world works. Indeed, universities are all too happy to promote this type of scholarship, especially among scholars of color. Romantic particularism, another tendency within oppositional work, is distinctly counterhegemonic but hesitates to portray the marginalized in all their complexity, a serious omission. Both rigorous scholarship and committed action demand that we identify and analyze the contradictions that are present in all social formations. The final tendency, which I will be referring to throughout this letter, is organic praxis. Gilmore defines oppositional work as "talk-plus-walk: it is [the] organization and promotion of ideas and bargaining in the political arena" (71). What distinguishes organic praxis is "the walk," or more specifically, political bargaining. Whether the bargaining takes place on campus or in the larger community is irrelevant; the point is that the scholar is somehow connected to oppositional action beyond that of writing for academic audiences.

Over the course of my career, I have been involved in several different movements and organizations primarily in Southern California. These include labor, environmental justice, and social justice groups. I have never been the leader of a major organization, nor am I an academic star. I am an average-performing academic who has tried to keep one foot firmly in academia, the other grounded in community struggles and in situations—in addition to trying to maintain some semblance of a personal life (the latter being a more recent development).

Certainly there is nothing exceptional in what I do, but for several reasons students have identified me as a scholar activist and frequently ask for my advice. One reason I am queried about such matters is that I come from a relatively small discipline, geography, where activists readily stand

out. Likewise, I come from an environment of people of color attract attention, curious as to how I negotiate the geographic work with people I am potentially other academics operating the potentially dehumanizing practices many students eager for role models. I hope that this chat helping scholars and activists to be a scholar activist.

I have structured the letter Topics range from the very practical demands of academia, to the ethical minefields of ethnographic honest with yourself. While success may appear scattered and inconclusive that these are some of the key minted PhDs need to be aware of their academic and political.

Question 1: How does your political work?

ANSWER: This is easily the most clearly, people assume that inside and scholarly work. Indeed, that for the most part I have administration. It is not that I have chosen, have provided me with I will discuss three of the fact colleagues, a solid publication For the most part I have they may not always agree with of academic freedom (if appropriate academic activity geography (partly because of studies and ethnicity (because tsu 1994), providing me with am certain that some colleagues the most part been professor

as well as my own commitment to pursue oppositional practice and the focus of (73) calls "organic praxis." Oppositional scholars, in particular, luxury production, and luxury production emphasize connection from larger groups with such work, and I am I an academic star: I tried to keep one foot in community struggles and in some semblance of a performance). I do, but for several reasons and frequently ask rich matters is that I come here activists readily stand

out. Likewise, I come from an exceedingly white discipline, where vocal people of color attract attention. Also, some young scholars are genuinely curious as to how I negotiate the challenges posed by conducting ethnographic work with people I am politically involved with. While there are many other academics operating within such a framework, I realize that the potentially dehumanizing process of graduate education results in many students eager for role models and alternative ways of being.¹ Consequently, I hope that this chapter will be a small contribution toward helping scholars and activists think through some of the implications of being a scholar activist.

I have structured the letter around six major questions and themes. Topics range from the very practical, such as how to balance the competing demands of academia, to the more abstract, including negotiating the ethical minefields of ethnography, to the personal, such as the need to be honest with yourself. While such an approach is less than ideal in that it may appear scattered and incoherent, I trust my instincts and experience that these are some of the key things that graduate students and newly minted PhDs need to be aware of as they go about the business of building their academic and political lives.

Question 1: How does your department/university respond to your political work?

ANSWER: This is easily the most frequently asked question that I receive. Clearly, people assume that institutions oppose counterhegemonic activist and scholarly work. Indeed, many are genuinely surprised when I explain that for the most part I have not faced any real problems from my administration. It is not that I happen to teach at some enlightened institution; rather, a variety of circumstances, both fortuitous and deliberately chosen, have provided me with the space necessary to be a scholar activist. I will discuss three of the factors that have contributed to this situation: colleagues, a solid publication record, and my sense of self.

For the most part I have been blessed with colleagues who, though they may not always agree with what I do and how I do it, respect the notion of academic freedom (if not the actual work that I do). The scope of appropriate academic activity has been defined broadly in my fields of geography (partly because of its connection to planning) and American studies and ethnicity (because of the activist roots of ethnic studies; Omatu 1994), providing me with ample room to be a scholar activist. While I am certain that some colleagues disagree with my politics, they have for the most part been professional and respectful. Moreover, I have several

senior colleagues who are also scholar activists in their own right, and I suspect that they have been instrumental in paving the way for more junior colleagues to pursue such a path. They have set a high standard of both scholarship and social commitment, showing that the two are not mutually exclusive, and this, in turn, has made my life much easier. While there is an element of luck to my situation regarding my colleagues—I know many who are not so fortunate—the truth is that I carefully considered it when I first began searching for a new job. I was not interested in the most prestigious university or the best geography program; rather, I was looking for a place that was in Los Angeles and that would allow me to flourish as a scholar activist. Because of the reputation of some of my senior colleagues, I thought that USC would be a potential fit, and I was right: not only was I fortunate, but I chose well.

A second reason that I have not encountered serious problems from my institution is that I have maintained a steady publication record, which, regardless of what anyone says, is the primary thing that academics get evaluated on at research universities (Goldsmith, Komlos, and Schine Gold 2001, ch. 7). Mine is not a great record—certainly I publish far less than some of my more “productive” colleagues—but it is solid and entirely acceptable. I strongly suspect that had I not published on terms satisfactory to the institution, I might well have encountered far greater problems. Thus, to a certain extent, the publication record has served as a shield of sorts. Though a strong publication record will not protect you if the institution is intent on getting rid of you, it is the first line of defense. If the publication record is “weak,” however that is defined by the powers that be, that will be the first and potentially easiest way for the institution to eliminate you (Winkler 2000, 744). This applies to all scholar activists, but particularly to scholars of color, who often publish in journals deemed “marginal to the discipline” by hostile forces. Knowing this, I consciously built a solid publication record so that the university would have a relatively hard time dismissing me.²

A final factor contributing to my limited experience of institutional conflict stems from my own perception of the situation. A strong sense of self, clarity of purpose, and knowledge of my priorities have helped buffer me against institutional pressures. I realize that this factor is much more subjective than the first two mentioned and that it edges toward relativism. But upon surveying my own experience as well as that of others, I am convinced that my sense of purpose and identity—my knowledge of who I was, who I wanted to be, and how that translated into particular behaviors—has helped minimize my experience of institutional conflict.

This does not imply that conflictence it as an acute problem.

A telling moment came when janitorial and food-service work embroiled in a contract statement was subcontracting, and the union wage workers of color initiated the administration into accepting several other faculty, became disbrought the workers and union research projects around the issue get involved; I was part of a similar pressure the administration; I disobedience actions and eventually campus-wide fast in support of approximately two years before I year after I received it. Because fact opportunity to get rid of it tion, but I also knew that I could kind of person would I be? I worried saw myself as. Could I live without conclusions that helped me chart a myself that I deserved tenure v Once I was clear on those matters their significance and meaning them. In this instance, the work but what it meant for me had denial as a negative judgment; an act would be politically incorrect and abilities. I could live v ure I would fight it in court. rayed against me, my various choices, my course of action be I do not wish to imply that face are due to their own perception heard all too many instances most brutal fashion. So let's list. But there is a sizable gray individuals choose to experie

s in their own right, and I paving the way for more have set a high standard of wing that the two are not my life much easier. While regarding my colleagues—I wish is that I carefully con- w job. I was not interested geography program, rather, as and that would allow me reputation of some of my re a potential fit, and I was

ed serious problems from steady publication record, rimary thing that academ- (Goldsmith, Komlos, and record—certainly I publish colleagues—but it is solid it had I not published on well have encountered far he publication record has ublication record will not rid of you, it is the first “weak,” however that is first and potentially easiest er 2000, 744). This applies rs of color, who often pub- pline” by hostile forces, ication record so that the missing me.² experience of institutional tuation. A strong sense of iorities have helped buffer : this factor is much more it it edges toward relativ- s well as that of others, I antity—my knowledge of translated into particular e of institutional conflict.

This does not imply that conflict doesn't exist, only that I do not experi- ence it as an acute problem.

A telling moment came when I was up for tenure. At that time the janitorial and food-service workers on my campus had become deeply embroiled in a contract stalemate with the administration. The main issue was subcontracting, and the unions, both of which were composed of low-wage workers of color, initiated community-based campaigns to pressure the administration into accepting a more favorable contract. I, along with several other faculty, became deeply involved in the campaign. I routinely brought the workers and union organizers to my classes; I organized class research projects around the issues; I encouraged students to organize and get involved; I was part of a small group that tried to get other faculty to pressure the administration; I participated in marches, rallies, and civil disobedience actions and eventually helped organize and participated in a campus-wide fast in support of the workers. These activities began approximately two years before I was up for tenure and continued until the year after I received it. Because of the timing, the university had the perfect opportunity to get rid of me. I knew that I was in a vulnerable position, but I also knew that I could not refrain from involvement—What kind of person would I be? I would not be the person that I wanted to be or saw myself as. Could I live with myself? I reached two important conclusions that helped me chart a course of action: I decided, first, that I had to be involved, and second, that I deserved tenure. For me, convincing myself that I deserved tenure was a bigger hurdle than actually getting it. Once I was clear on those matters, I could readily identify my fears, assess their significance and meaning for me, and, eventually, move beyond them. In this instance, the worst-case scenario was my not getting tenure, but what it *meant* for me had changed—I no longer interpreted tenure denial as a negative judgment of me or my performance. I knew that such an act would be politically motivated and not a true reflection of my record and abilities. I could live with that. I decided that if I was denied tenure I would fight it in court. Once I understood the objective forces arrayed against me, my various options, and the emotions driving those choices, my course of action became not only apparent but comfortable.

I do not wish to imply that all or even most problems scholar activists face are due to their own perceptions of the problem. I have seen and heard all too many instances when administrators go after faculty in the most brutal fashion. So let's be clear—witch hunts and retaliation do exist. But there is a sizable gray area between such hostile actions and how individuals choose to experience the situation. This gray area is shaped

not only by circumstances over which we have no control but also by our identity, sense of purpose, and ability to be honest with ourselves. Rest assured, as a scholar activist you *will* be tried, but if you are clear in your convictions, then the crisis will not be quite so traumatic; it becomes just an episode, though a potentially difficult one. If, on the other hand, deep down inside you are less than sure of what you are about, then that event may indeed become a crisis forcing you to acknowledge the truth of who you really are.

Question 2: How does one combine scholarship and activism?

ANSWER: Although such a question may appear to be relatively straightforward, in reality it is anything but. This is because how you combine scholarship and activism is linked to how you construct your life. In my case, building an integrated life has been a key part of being a scholar activist.

Allow me to begin with an often overlooked issue that has emerged as crucial to me: place. Perhaps because I am a geographer I have realized the need to deal with the reality and limitations imposed by space. Place figures two ways in my life. First, I do not traverse space particularly well, and, second, I am passionate about the place where I live, Los Angeles. Such a confluence of circumstances, while seemingly mundane, has made it relatively easy for me to build an integrated set of research, teaching, and political activities centered in one geographical location. This, in turn, has provided a convenient framework for my life as a scholar activist.

I did not initially consider space to be a relevant issue in shaping my political and academic work, but over time I discovered its importance. My dissertation research, which explored environmental activism among working-class Chicanas/os, focused on two specific places, northern New Mexico and central California. I realized quickly the conflict between my life as a researcher and my life as a political activist: if I wished to work with and become a committed member of those communities, this would entail a particular type of energy expenditure that was especially difficult for me—traveling. As much as I like seeing new places and meeting new people, travel is stressful on my body and usually results in some illness afterwards. For a long time I denied this fact and pushed myself, insisting that this was simply what politically committed academics did. Indeed, travel has essentially become a job requirement for all scholars. Eventually I acknowledged that traveling was not sustainable for me, and I began to locate most of my activities at home. Of course, there are many ways I *could* have been a scholar activist from a distance, including doing applied

research, advocacy work, and funne averse to doing such things, such me from being part of the *everyday* which has been paramount to me

Thankfully, not everyone feels who are intimately involved with well as halfway across the globe Routledge 2003; Gilmore and Gil the physical and social distances facilitated increasingly by rapidly not for such people, the geograph be more skewed than it is, leaving benefits and resources, however bring to marginalized communities The question of geography m your particular situation. That's think about your basic character want to live your life. As this exsues can play a major role in hoously, there is no right way to with and what kind of relation: find a situation that works for tribute, and find meaning.

Just as space is important to too is time. Do you prefer lonships with activist communities relationships, but there are me One of the reasons I tend to groups is that I have seen nur ready to contribute, do their th as sometimes organizations a quick assistance and such a str: am comfortable with because i of the community and issues lack the kind of skills typical tance (see Question 5) and als movement activism, I have so activists who share my politic: You may consider issues of really they provide the four

o control but also by our rest with ourselves. Rest if you are clear in your traumatic; it becomes just on the other hand, deep re about, then that event wledge the truth of who

hip and activism?

to be relatively straight- cause how you combine nstruct your life. In my art of being a scholar ac-

ssue that has emerged as apher I have realized the imposed by space. Place se space particularly well, here I live, Los Angeles. ngly mundane, has made set of research, teaching, al location. This, in turn, as a scholar activist.

rant issue in shaping my iscovered its importance. nmental activism among fic places, northern New the conflict between my ivist: if I wished to work communities, this would at was especially difficult places and meeting new ly results in some illness pushed myself, insisting d academics did. Indeed, for all scholars. Eventu- nable for me, and I began re, there are many ways I e, including doing applied

research, advocacy work, and fund-raising, for example. While I was not averse to doing such things, such an arrangement would have precluded me from being part of the *everyday* life of an organization or movement, which has been paramount to me (more on that later).

Thankfully, not everyone feels this way. I have known many scholars who are intimately involved with communities beyond their backyard as well as halfway across the globe (Sangtin Writers and Negar 2006; Routledge 2003; Gilmore and Gilmore 2003). Such individuals negotiate the physical and social distances between the various parts of their lives, facilitated increasingly by rapidly evolving technology. Indeed, if it were not for such people, the geographic distribution of scholar activists would be more skewed than it is, leaving large swaths of the globe without the benefits and resources, however meager, that committed academics can bring to marginalized communities.

The question of geography may appear to be mundane or irrelevant to your particular situation. That's okay. The point is to encourage you to think about your basic character, your likes and dislikes, and how you want to live your life. As this example illustrates, seemingly irrelevant issues can play a major role in how you develop as a scholar activist. Obviously, there is no right way to decide which communities you will work with and what kind of relationship(s) you will construct. The goal is to find a situation that works for you in which you are able to grow, contribute, and find meaning.

Just as space is important to the development of scholar activists, so too is time. Do you prefer long-term, short-term, or sporadic relationships with activist communities? I have a strong preference for long-term relationships, but there are merits to each, provided the proper context. One of the reasons I tend toward long-term commitments with activist groups is that I have seen numerous academics rush into a community ready to contribute, do their thing, and leave. This is not necessarily bad, as sometimes organizations and movements are in dire need of some quick assistance and such a strategy serves a need,³ but it is not a model I am comfortable with because it pays scant attention to the ongoing needs of the community and issues of reciprocity. In my case, partly because I lack the kind of skills typically associated with critical short-term assistance (see Question 5), and also because of my scholarly interest in social movement activism, I have sought to build long-term relationships with activists who share my political interests and commitments.

You may consider issues of space and time to be fairly abstract, but in reality they provide the foundation for more concrete matters. Identify-

ing such key issues has facilitated my ability to integrate my research, teaching, university service, and political activism. The first three, research, teaching, and service, constitute the pillars of any academic career. Although universities usually view these domains separately, many scholar activists, myself included, manage to weave them together so that they perform "double duty" in terms of university requirements. For example, much of my research and many of my publications have been based on my community "service." More recently, I have tried to create the same kind of symbiosis pedagogically. Over the last seven years or so, I have designed most of my undergraduate courses so that they are centered on a community-based research project. My motivation was largely pedagogic, as I had come to realize that students are far more apt to remember and be transformed by what they *do* than by what they hear and read. At the same time, I realized that this was a way to contribute to and strengthen my relationship with local community groups. Fortunately, the university has either supported such activities or, more often, simply not blocked them, even when they were critical of the institution (see, e.g., Houston and Pulido 2002). While this has been my experience, I know that faculty have been disciplined both formally and informally for engaging students in research critical of their employers. In such cases, scholar activists would do well to study their institution in advance in order to assess how it might respond to critical projects. At the very least you can hopefully make an informed decision about how you want to proceed.

In short, by integrating my research, teaching, and political activities as much as possible and keeping them in all one place, I feel that I have been able to sustain myself as a scholar activist and contribute in various ways to causes I am committed to. The specifics of how you choose to be a scholar activist will differ for everyone, but what is important is that you are clear on your particular needs and how that will inform your political and academic life.

Question 3: What kind of scholar activist should I be?

ANSWER: There are many different ways of being a scholar activist, each of which has its own merits and makes a particular contribution. For example, there are public intellectuals along the lines of Howard Zinn (1999), those who see their theoretical work as directly contributing to activism (Riedner and Tritelli 1999), those who engage in advocacy research (Hondagneu-Sorelo 1993), and those who practice "militant ethnography" (Juris 2005). In addition to the type of activism one might

choose, there is also the question toward transforming the campus the world? To further complicate there is considerable variation. In example, some scholar activists may yashi 1994; Meagher 1999), while members. Indeed, an individual rries over time, as Alan Wald h What is important is that you ar activist, the reasons for such a d over time. Whether one is drawn thrust into a particular role (a into activism; Pulido 2006, ch. 3 sues is negotiating change. Not but we need to consciously decid than just letting life happen to scholar activist, and how can or becoming an activist and an ir products of both larger political tors, and one's personal dynam (Pulido 2003). By understandir can appreciate how individual c

External events are larger st portunities/obstacles, and other yond your control. These are d provide an example of one su on the Third World Left in Lo African American, Asian Amei amined the extent to which di of radical politics. As part of tl cization of activists, particular politicization. Although there members of the various racial traced their early political in movement and the Black civil found and pervasive that they take a position. Both are exam larger historical backdrop that The internal, in contrast, i one's personality, temperame

o integrate my research, ism. The first three, re- s of any academic career- mains separately, many ve them together so that ty requirements. For ex- , publications have been ty, I have tried to create he last seven years or so, ses so that they are cen- y motivation was largely s are far more apt to re- in by what they hear and way to contribute to and ty groups. Fortunately, es or, more often, simply l of the institution (see, s been my experience, I mally and informally for mployers. In such cases, titution in advance in or- rojects. At the very least about how you want to

g, and political activities e place, I feel that I have and contribute in various f how you choose to be a t is important is that you will inform your political

could I be?

g a scholar activist, each lar contribution. For ex- e lines of Howard Zinn ; directly contributing to ; engage in advocacy re- o practice "militant eth- e of activism one might

choose, there is also the question of site. Will you direct your energies toward transforming the campus, the local community, the country, or the world? To further complicate matters, within each of these categories there is considerable variation. In terms of community activism, for example, some scholar activists may assume positions of leadership (Kobayashi 1994; Meagher 1999), while others may contribute as rank-and-file members. Indeed, an individual may move through these various categories over time, as Alan Wald has shown (Fritelli and Hanscom 1999). What is important is that you are aware of *how* you wish to be a scholar activist, the reasons for such a decision, and how that choice may change over time. Whether one is drawn to a specific form of activism or simply thrust into a particular role (a surprising number of people "stumble" into activism; Pulido 2006, ch. 3), it seems to me that one of the key issues is negotiating change. Not only is change often difficult for people, but we need to consciously decide what direction we wish to move rather than just letting life happen to us. In short, how does one evolve as a scholar activist, and how can one facilitate that process? The business of becoming an activist and an individual's trajectory of activism are the products of both larger political events, what might be called external factors, and one's personal dynamics, what I refer to as internal factors (Pulido 2003). By understanding both the external and the internal, we can appreciate how individual changes occur at the nexus of both.

External events are larger shifts in the political climate, organizing opportunities/obstacles, and other situational changes that usually are beyond your control. These are developments that you must respond to. I'll provide an example of one such instance. I recently completed a project on the Third World Left in Los Angeles. This was a comparative study of African American, Asian American, and Chicana/o activists in which I examined the extent to which differential racialization led to distinct forms of radical politics. As part of the investigation, I explored the early politicization of activists, particularly the circumstances that had led to their politicization. Although there were some interesting variations among members of the various racial/ethnic groups, across the board all activists traced their early political involvement to two key events: the antiwar movement and the Black civil rights struggle. These events were so profound and pervasive that they forced individuals to respond to them and take a position. Both are examples of external events—they provide the larger historical backdrop that shapes our lives.

The internal, in contrast, is a vast terrain that includes such things as one's personality, temperament, moral compass, and stage in the life cycle.

These are factors that will greatly influence what activities we decide to pursue at a given time. At one point, for instance, I was deeply involved with a local organization, the Labor/Community Strategy Center. Until then I had largely eschewed campus activism for community engagement (I will admit to not only preferring community activism but also seeing it as more "authentic" than campus work, an admittedly problematic distinction). However, when the worker conflicts on my campus arose, I was soon called upon to get involved, and I felt, given my position as a faculty member, that my participation was essential. I quickly learned, however, that I could not maintain two spheres of political work very well. I felt very scattered and did not feel that I was able to give my best to either struggle. Moreover, it was at a time when I began experiencing some health problems and wanted to simplify and streamline my life somewhat. For these reasons, I decided to focus on the campus labor struggles—a decision very much driven by internal factors. Upon the conclusion of the labor campaigns, the campus itself had changed considerably, and I became increasingly immersed in campus activism. Not only had the campus changed, but I had changed, and I began to see and enjoy the possibilities of campus activism in a new light.

I realize that I have articulated a somewhat artificial distinction between the external and the internal, but I have found this to be a useful device insofar as it illuminates distinct spheres of influence. Of course, the reality is that internal and external are always in dynamic conversation and shape the overall tapestry of one's life, as can be seen in my decision to concentrate on campus activism. The point, as always, is to pay attention to what is going on both outside and inside as you negotiate changes in your trajectory as a scholar activist.

Question 4: As a scholar activist, how should I approach community work?

ANSWER: Two fundamental issues should guide how scholar activists approach community work: accountability and reciprocity. Both are shorthand for a series of important relations, including how individual scholars view themselves as activists, how they see themselves in relation to other activists, and the kinds of relationships they build. When all is said and done, what kind of scholar activist you are and the amount and type of work that you produce are secondary to the issues of accountability and reciprocity. In my experience, these are the criteria by which you will be judged and remembered.

Accountability refers to the mavericks. Indeed, the idea of a thing of an oxymoron. The whole you are *embedded* in a web of high level of accountability to a It is accountability that will help in the effort to create social change itself as *part* of a community of ; occasionally drops in. As long as rector of Rights for All People problems with scholar activists ; are not sufficiently rooted in the sense of where their time should be put forward is short term connection to the larger goal is not interview July 2, 2004. Los Angeles

It has become commonplace complain about academics who one but rather privilege their capable, as academia is all about the vice, promotion, and evaluation from a larger social context. In process (or at least effective about becoming a scholar activist you will reconcile your own community. And while I see many to work with others, being helped to be true because I have been.

Closely related to but distinct *reciprocity* denotes a mutual give and tists must always be attentive to resent academics who are not who swoop in, collect what they on, having enriched themselves substance to the community in they are providing an important subordinated or otherwise made (certainly, conventional academic be fooled. Writing about a community confused with reciprocity. Cor

t activities we decide to
 2. I was deeply involved
 Strategy Center. Unil
 community engagement
 tivism but also seeing it
 ittedly problematic dis-
 my campus arose, I was
 my position as a faculty
 rickly learned, however,
 I work very well. I felt
 , give my best to either
 gan experiencing some
 eamline my life some-
 he campus labor strug-
 ctors. Upon the conclu-
 d changed considerably,
 activism. Not only had
 gan to see and enjoy the

artificial distinction be-
 found this to be a useful
 influence. Of course, the
 n dynamic conversation
 i be seen in my decision
 always, is to pay atten-
 s you negotiate changes

I approach

ow scholar activists ap-
 procity. Both are short-
 how individual scholars
 sives in relation to other
 Id. When all is said and
 the amount and type of
 es of accountability and
 ia by which you will be

Accountability refers to the fact that scholar activists are not lone mavericks. Indeed, the idea of a scholar activist operating alone is something of an oxymoron. The whole point of being a scholar activist is that you are *embedded* in a web of relationships, some of which demand a high level of accountability to a community or other group of individuals. It is accountability that will hopefully ensure the relevancy of your work in the effort to create social change. Accountability requires seeing yourself as *part* of a community of struggle, rather than as the academic who occasionally drops in. As longtime activist Lisa Duran, the executive director of Rights for All People (RAP), recently explained, “One of the problems with scholar activists is that they’re just not useful because they are not sufficiently rooted in the community so that they don’t have a sense of where their time should be spent. Being clear on how the effort being put forward is short term, long term, or medium term and its connection to the larger goal is not just an idea—it’s rooted in struggle” (interview, July 2, 2004, Los Angeles).

It has become commonplace to hear activists and community residents complain about academics who act as if they are not accountable to anyone but rather privilege their own work and agenda. This is understandable, as academia is all about the individual: one’s research, teaching, service, promotion, and evaluation all focus on the individual abstracted from a larger social context. In contrast, activism is very much a collective process (or at least effective activism usually is). Thus, if you are serious about becoming a scholar activist, at some point you need to decide how you will reconcile your own personal desires with that of a larger community. And while I see many students and faculty who genuinely want to work with others, being held accountable is another story. I know this to be true because I have been one of those persons (see below).

Closely related to but distinct from accountability is reciprocity. *Reciprocity* denotes a mutual give and take and is something that scholar activists must always be attentive to. Just as activists and community residents resent academics who are not accountable, so too do they resent those who swoop in, collect what they need from a community, and then move on, having enriched themselves but not necessarily provided anything of substance to the community in question. Academics often rationalize that they are providing an important service simply by telling the story of a subordinated or otherwise marginalized group. While some may buy this (certainly, conventional academic norms encourage such thinking), do not be fooled. Writing about a community’s plight or struggle should *not* be confused with reciprocity. Consider for a moment what the scholar is get-

olar is most likely earned, then the data or a promotion, an entree, and perhaps some of the community benefit? Though it is certainly true the situation is to improve; that story will not lead to a shift in power and workers struggled to a shift in power communities, such as Malachia, and South Central power dynamics embedded costs. For this reason, my experiences with new ones.

Every scholar activist rather, it means the examples of how this upon my own experience city, and in the second, I wrote Hondagnou-Sotelo, is from my dissertation. The project centered in California and New Pulido (1996b). The New, a community-based organization. I was deeply sympathetic and its struggle, but I think. Besides thinking of myself in a subliminal and did not see how to make some offers of assistance. In addition, the was unwilling to make a and have required travel and viable relationship

with the group. In short, I was simply not willing to make the necessary investment of time and energy, despite my good intentions.

The situation was complicated by identity politics. Although other scholars were also studying Ganados del Valle, I was one of the few Chicanas/os. Our shared heritage added a layer of ethnic confusion to the picture: not only did I sense (correctly) that the white researchers thought I had a different relationship to the community, but also I was uncertain about the meaning of my identity in the research process. Did I have a greater connection because of our ethnicity, despite the significant differences between an urban Chicana and rural New Mexicans? If so, did I also have a greater responsibility? Finally, because I was already a political activist of sorts, I assumed that I would produce politically relevant and useful work. However, I was still under the illusion that simply telling a story was a politically useful act. In short, although I was a political activist in Los Angeles, and although I identified as a scholar activist, the reality was that I was not yet one, as I did not understand fully what being one meant.

Being accountable would have required me to perhaps stay longer and/or make numerous repeat trips to the region; it would have necessitated shifting from my narrow dissertation focus to develop related projects and activities that were of more direct use to the community. Instead, regardless of the reasons, I operated as a scholar—certainly a very sympathetic one—but not a scholar activist. As can be seen, accountability requires flexibility, the ability to give of yourself, and willingness to step outside yourself, regardless of how “oppositional” your research might be. While I am not exactly proud of how I handled myself in this situation, the episode was important insofar as it made me realize that I needed to figure out how to be a scholar activist.

Fortunately, I did figure it out over time. However, for an entirely different reason, I now once again find myself in a situation of not being able to reciprocate and be held accountable. Three years ago I became a mother, and while this has brought me great joy, I have had to scale back my political work. Given the centrality of reciprocity to me, however, this has meant a change in research focus, as I would not feel comfortable writing on community organizing and activism without everyday participation. Not only would this limitation result in inferior scholarship, but such a practice would violate my code of reciprocity, as I lack the time and energy to give back to any communities. Consequently, I am currently pursuing archival and popular education projects (see “A People’s Guide to Los Angeles,” www.pgta.org). Hopefully, when my children are older, I

can return to a life of intense political engagement and writing about my passion, social movements.

In contrast, my friend and colleague Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo understood early on what being a scholar activist entailed and how reciprocity worked. For her dissertation, Hondagneu-Sotelo conducted extensive fieldwork among Mexican immigrants in Northern California, exploring how gender relations were transformed through the migration process. On the basis of the data she gathered, she wrote her dissertation, received a PhD, and eventually turned it into an award-winning book (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Although Hondagneu-Sotelo benefited immeasurably by tapping into the lives, stories, and experiences of these Mexican immigrants, she also understood the power dynamics at play and was not content to simply take from her subjects. Upon completing her fieldwork she moved to Southern California, where she became involved with a group called Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights, Los Angeles (CHIRLA). Initially, she simply asked CHIRLA how she might be of service—always a good first move. Eventually it was decided that the group would create a series of *fotonovelas* to be used for popular education purposes among Latino immigrants. Hondagneu-Sotelo's research led specifically to the development of a *fotonovela* focused on the rights of domestic workers (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1993), which has been widely used. In this case the researcher reciprocated, not directly with the individuals she had investigated, but rather with the same class or group of people. The fact that she had moved to another part of the state did not hinder her commitment and sense of responsibility to the community in question; instead, she found innovative ways to maintain accountability and to reciprocate.

*Question 5: I want to be useful to the "community."
What kind of work should I do?*

ANSWER: This is a very common question, as it gets to the heart of what most scholar activists desire: to be of service and to change the world. While there are many ways to alter the existing social formation, many hope that their research will be of direct use to those actually engaged in counterhegemonic struggle. In reality, however, the production of such research raises a host of issues concerning how activists operate as researchers. I will begin by discussing the kind of research that social change organizations often need and will then present alternatives one might consider if one lacks the requisite skills outlined.

There is, admittedly, something very compelling about conducting research of direct use to activists. Outside the classroom, there are few ven-

ues where academics can really concrete change result from the productive ends creates a deep: all disciplines engage in such reentists—given that field's supportive, technical, grant-writing, what many social change organizations; people who can conduct sophisticated; people who can challenge tanks on their own turf, and and/or fund new projects. Quar people who know how to make Impact Report (EIR), or decision though often devalued in theodous difference to a community Los Angeles-area researchers Employees International Union entitled "A Penny for Justice" to which the public subsidized searchers argued that employe hour could provide janitors v burden the public with such scholarship that was debated and ultimately helped the jan2000).

Unfortunately, I am not one of quantitative skills, and my people about their experience such products are of far less u working with. Accordingly, I match problem. My research example. *Environmental justice* people of color and low-income tion (Bullard 1993). Environm a graduate student; thus, not movement. Activists welcome parent that I did not have tl they needed researchers who nities to a larger audience and

nt and writing about my
 ; Hondagneu-Sorelo un-
 tailed and how recipro-
 celo conducted extensive
 rn California, exploring
 i the migration process.
 ner dissertation, received
 winning book (Hondag-
 benefited immeasurably
 of these Mexican immi-
 at play and was not con-
 pleting her fieldwork she
 e involved with a group
 Los Angeles (CHIRLA).
 ht be of service—always
 the group would create a
 ucation purposes among
 h led specifically to the
 hts of domestic workers
 ly used. In this case the
 ividuals she had invest-
 people. The fact that she
 hinder her commitment
 in question; instead, she
 r and to reciprocate.

unity.”

gets to the heart of what
 nd to change the world.
 s social formation, many
 hose actually engaged in
 the production of such
 r activists operate as re-
 of research that social
 present alternatives one
 lined.
 ing about conducting re-
 room, there are few ven-

ues where academics can really feel that they make a difference and see concrete change result from their work. Seeing one's research put to such productive ends creates a deep sense of satisfaction. Although scholars of all disciplines engage in such research, it is performed most by social scientists—given that field's supposed goals of addressing societal problems. If you harbor such aspirations, I would recommend honing your quantitative, technical, grant-writing, and policy skills. In my experience, this is what many social change organizations need when it comes to research: people who can conduct sophisticated quantitative and/or technical analyses; people who can challenge both policy makers and right-wing think tanks on their own turf; and people who can help organizations grow and/or fund new projects. Quantitative skills are always in demand, as are people who know how to make maps using GIS, digest an Environmental Impact Report (EIR), or decipher a state budget. Such research skills, though often devalued in theoretically driven fields, can make a tremendous difference to a community struggle. For example, several years ago Los Angeles-area researchers employed by Justice for Janitors (Service Employees International Union [SEIU] 399, now 1877) produced a study entitled “A Penny for Justice” (SEIU 1995), which documented the extent to which the public subsidized low-wage janitors via health care costs. Researchers argued that employers, by contributing an additional penny per hour, could provide janitors with health insurance and thus no longer burden the public with such costs. This was a terrific piece of activist scholarship that was debated in city council, resonated with the public, and ultimately helped the janitors secure a better contract (Merrifield 2000).

Unfortunately, I am not one of those scholars. I have a very limited set of quantitative skills, and my passion is really for history and talking to people about their experiences and stories. I have found, however, that such products are of far less use to those communities I am interested in working with. Accordingly, I have had to think through this skills mismatch problem. My research on environmental justice provides a clear example. *Environmental justice* refers to the disproportionate exposure of people of color and low-income communities to environmental degradation (Bullard 1993). Environmental justice emerged as a topic while I was a graduate student; thus, not surprisingly, I became involved with the movement. Activists welcomed me as an academic, but it was quickly apparent that I did not have the skills that they really needed. Certainly they needed researchers who could tell the stories of struggling communities to a larger audience and who could challenge the hegemonic nature

of Western science, as well as attend rallies and lick envelopes—all of which I was happy to do. But what they *really* needed was someone who could identify various sources of pollution, map them, and conduct a rigorous demographic analysis of the data. This I could not do. To be honest, I could have retooled and learned these skills, but ultimately I was not willing to do so. I was not willing to put the movement's immediate needs ahead of my own because I knew I would have been miserable. I was much more interested in documenting the history of community struggle and exploring how the racial formation affected organizing efforts, as well as how discourses of race were operationalized within environmental justice politics and research (Pulido 2000, 1998, 1996a). While these topics were certainly of interest to the larger movement, they were not considered urgent or of immediate use.

I handled the problem in two ways. First, I did my best to connect the organizations in question with people who had the requisite skills. Although I lacked the specific research skills, I knew and had access to people who did. Sometimes this meant coaxing colleagues to help out, encouraging graduate students to get involved, or, in some cases, conducting preliminary assessments myself. Though this was a relatively small effort on my part, it was deeply appreciated by community residents and activists. As academics we often take for granted the resources available to us, resources that may be difficult for poor and working-class constituencies to access.

The second thing I did was to consciously contribute in other ways. While some scholar activists prefer to function primarily as researchers, I tried to be a reliable supporter/member who could provide whatever assistance was needed. Sometimes this required setting up tables and making phone calls, while at others it meant utilizing my legitimacy as a university professor to provide testimony, for example, at public hearings. Although I couldn't conduct specific forms of analysis, I could produce and contribute to a number of other projects that were useful to the overall struggle, including helping to write/edit newsletters, giving lectures on relevant topics, organizing class research projects that generated basic data, and developing popular education materials.

Despite being generally happy to contribute either as a researcher or as a general member, I am somewhat critical of the way that I have handled the situation. While I reject the model of the academic "expert," in retrospect I could have leveraged more of my "social capital" to greater effect. One reason I hesitated to do so was my discomfort with the distance between myself and the community in question. Feminist scholars

have problematized the space I 1993; Gilbert 1994; England 1994) of how uncomfortable, must be even power relations. While I kept time incorporating the knowledge partly because I come from a working-class people" who don't understand I result, for a long time I did not was uncomfortable with the social position. This, coupled with working-class communities oriented over backwards not to be like the comfortable with my "in-between job of contributing more fully was committed to (see also Que

Question 6: What kinds of e as a scholar activist?

ANSWER: Scholar activists will lemmas. This can catch them but the visions of the "beloved community" deeply entrenched narrative upon nonelites (Joseph 2002). able given hegemonic values, of unethical conduct and/or conditions may become more closer one is to a community. facilitates access to events, it (which may contribute to self-efficacy (which feeds the activity group, however, the boundaries come muddled, and response difficult. Such conflicts may be conflicts of interest, question commitment to the community While at first glance these may be as ethical ones. I do so because overlook the ethical dimension the exploration of how we share that ethical commitments

d lick envelopes—all of
eeded was someone who
hem, and conduct a rig-
uld not do. To be honest,
ut ultimately I was not
ment's immediate needs
e been miserable. I was
r of community struggle
rganizing efforts, as well
thin environmental jus-
66a). While these topics
t, they were not consid-

I my best to connect the
the requisite skills. Al-
w and had access to peo-
leagues to help out, en-
r some cases, conducting
; a relatively small effort
nity residents and activ-
resources available to us,
king-class constituencies

ontribute in other ways.
rimarily as researchers, I
uld provide whatever as-
ting up tables and mak-
my legitimacy as a uni-
nple, at public hearings.
nalysis, I could produce
were useful to the over-
eters, giving lectures on
cts that generated basic

either as a researcher or
he way that I have han-
he academic "expert," in
social capital" to greater
discomfort with the dis-
estion. Feminist scholars

have problematized the space between researchers and subjects (Behar 1993; Gilbert 1994; England 1994), arguing that this distance, regardless of how uncomfortable, must be acknowledged, as it is the result of uneven power relations. While I know this intellectually, I have had a harder time incorporating the knowledge into my attitudes and behavior. This is partly because I come from a working-class family: My parents are "those people" who don't understand EIRs and budgets and policy analyses. As a result, for a long time I did not wish to set myself apart from them and was uncomfortable with the status conferred by the PhD and my profes-sorial position. This, coupled with my disdain for those who related to working-class communities *only* as the academic expert, led me to bend over backwards not to be like them, but at a price. Had I been more com-fortable with my "in-betweenness," I might have been able to do a better job of contributing more fully to the communities and struggles that I was committed to (see also Question 3).

Question 6: What kinds of ethical problems might I confront as a scholar activist?

ANSWER: Scholar activists will inevitably encounter a range of ethical dilemmas. This can catch them by surprise, as they sometimes have roman-tic visions of the "beloved community." Among progressives there is a deeply entrenched narrative that confers a nebulous moral authority upon nonelites (Joseph 2002). While such beliefs are entirely understand-able given hegemonic values, subordinated communities can also be sites of unethical conduct and/or political disagreement (Nagar 2000). Contra-dictions may become more apparent and potentially problematic the closer one is to a community. Scholar activists often seek closeness, as it facilitates access to events, materials, and members of the community (which may contribute to scholarship) and produces a sense of political efficacy (which feeds the activist). As you become more integrated into a group, however, the boundaries between the scholar and activist may be-come muddled, and responding to conflicting demands increasingly difficult. Such conflicts may be fraught with ethical challenges, including conflicts of interest, questions of representation, and questions of one's commitment to the community (versus the university, discipline, etc.). While at first glance these may appear to be political issues, I frame them as ethical ones. I do so because progressive scholars and activists routinely overlook the ethical dimensions of political activism. If we define ethics as the exploration of how we should best live our lives, it will become appar-ent that ethical commitments underlie most political positions. If we wish

political work—which I
 role of ethics. The world
 ras, and although I only
 sion will encourage you
 life.

ment I had with a labor
 iefs. In short, I was not
 hat *ethics* does not refer
 ; how we act in relation
 d relationships with un-
 and at the forefront of
 unionism is a form of
 lewant to working-class
 not just narrow bread-
 ial movement unionism
 movement, rather than
) (Milkman 2000; Bern-
 nd energy of the locals
 ot just ones related to
 on me to attend events,
 disobedience, or what-
 bout my participation: I
 ; assisting workers who
 ut also for a better un-

I disagreed with, there
 id one local until the is-
 e, California, like many
 gambling operations on
 highly profitable enter-
 act that a protected mi-
 n an explosion of legis-
 st came before the Cali-
 posed Proposition 5. It
 ; that the proposed law
 ate, something that or-
 nber of grounds.
 rt portion of the Indian
 been raised regarding
 opposing Proposition 5.

which legalized the expansion of Indian gaming, a progressive labor union, was, in effect, pitted against Indian tribes. Regardless of the pros and cons of Indian gaming, I disagreed with how the union advocated its position. Although Indian gaming is not without its problems, I felt that native peoples should be allowed sovereignty to the extent possible. Moreover, given the genocide, displacement, and poverty they have suffered and continue to endure, I hesitate to categorize indigenous people as just another special-interest group, as I believed the union was doing. I agreed that questions of workers' rights and wages needed to be addressed, but through political negotiation. Given that two marginalized groups were at the heart of the conflict, I hoped that both parties would be committed to working out an acceptable solution.

Instead, the union waged an all-out war against Proposition 5, assuming that once I was "educated" on the matter I would get on board, as I had with other issues. The local invited me to speak at events, distribute pamphlets, and get other people involved in the cause. I could not do so, however, because my heart was not in it. Perhaps I was somewhat naive in my hope that the matter could be resolved outside the legislative arena, but what is important is that I disagreed with the union's approach and lacked the courage to say so. I did occasionally try to complicate the situation, question the union's strategy, and point out various contradictions, but I did not systematically explain my position and why I could not actively participate in this campaign. This was a low point for me in my experience as a scholar activist: I felt great pressure from the union but could not speak my truth. In retrospect, I believe that most union members would have accepted my decision and respected it as simply a political disagreement, but I was too afraid to test the waters, too afraid of somehow having my commitment questioned. Given where I am at today, I am confident that I would handle the situation differently, as I have a greater ability to stand by my convictions. But I also understand that this particular event helped me reach that point. Ethical dilemmas and political disagreements, however difficult, are valuable opportunities that allow us to clarify our beliefs and how we wish to act upon them, which is all part of the process of political development.

The second ethical conflict I wish to address involves representations of scholarly work, particularly differing interpretations and narrations of activism and activists and how they are represented in texts. Although volumes have been written on the question of representation from various perspectives, my intent is to discuss how I have experienced this problem as a scholar activist. Although I present one instance, I have en-

h project in which I have
 nus other scholar activists
 ting that it is a common
 qualitative fieldwork.

ted *Black, Brown, Yellow*,
 ido 2006). The project was
 many interviews with Af-
 o activists. Since I sought
 ic group and with whom I
 ion, or the willingness of
 was key in getting those I
 ivists were hesitant to dis-
 feel betrayed by previous
 them, but they also had
 erns, my activist " creden-
 terviews and also offered
 ild be appropriately told.
 ly and did my utmost to
 accuracy, not only because
 people, but also because I
 files and wished to portray

rking with my interview-
 olars have pioneered vari-
 n, have been embraced by
 thers such as Diane Fujino
 (see Healey and Isserman
 nd Nagar 2006) have pur-
 nodels of knowledge pro-
 rk together on the project
 y a modified approach in
 view drafts, and asked to
 ry decision.

anscribed them, and sent
 ough few actually com-
 le feedback and, perhaps
 with a transcript, which
 of the manuscript, I sent
 ents and incorporated a
 exchanges lengthened the

process, but these are common practices among those seeking to address
 the power imbalance inherent in contemporary social science research.

During the course of *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*, I did a series of
 interviews with Asian American activists and wrote an account of one
 Japanese American organization. This was a difficult history to recon-
 struct, as there were few written records; I had to piece together a narra-
 tive based largely on individuals' memories. Not only are memories noto-
 riously faulty, but more importantly, they reflect distinct experiences—
 which differed radically in this case. As usual, I sent the manuscript to all
 the interviewees; this led to a collective conversation among them and
 prompted another former activist to ask to be interviewed late in the
 process. I happily obliged, thinking the new material might add greater
 accuracy to the text. And in fact the informant was extremely helpful in
 identifying shortcomings and helping to clarify the organizational ac-
 count. However, she differed radically from the other members in her
 analysis of the group's gender relations. While most interviewees de-
 scribed the organization as patriarchal and sexist, she insisted that it was
 not. When confronted with the evidence that other interviewees had pre-
 sented, she often dismissed the other female informants as being "weak"
 on gender issues or simply not recalling things accurately. She continued
 to communicate with me over several months through e-mails explaining
 her perspective on the organization. Typically, these e-mails were also
 sent to the other interviewees, a correspondence that allowed me to
 glimpse not only the differing interpretations of gender relations but also
 how members interacted with each other. The reality was that the activ-
 ists were continuing to play out the dynamics of an earlier period, includ-
 ing issues that had not yet been resolved. Unfortunately, being part of
 this process was extremely time consuming and emotionally draining, as
 I was under intense pressure from the various parties to portray their ex-
 perience and interpretations as *the* organizational experience. I felt as if I
 had walked into a quagmire of difficult personalities and unresolved is-
 sues to which there was no easy answer or exit. After several months of
 intense interactions, and after I had taken firm positions with the various
 parties, I invoked the press deadline as one way of concluding the dia-
 logue. Ultimately, I decided to depict the organization as patriarchal
 (though far less so than its Chicana/o and African American counter-
 parts), but with clear acknowledgment that not all parties agreed on this
 interpretation. Although this experience is hardly uncommon, it was nev-
 ertheless difficult and raised several ethical concerns: To what extent
 should one accommodate the needs and desires of one's research subjects?

What are the political and ethical implications of privileging particular narratives? Where does my responsibility to the informant end and my role as researcher take precedence? Certainly the answers to these questions will depend on both the individual and the circumstance. Indeed, it is not my intent to offer any ready solutions. Rather, I wish to illustrate the kinds of ethical challenges I face in the course of my research—issues that you might very well confront yourself.

Upon the conclusion of such research I am usually so drained that I often follow a major ethnographic project with an archival or theoretical study requiring minimal emotional energy. Such work, I find, restores me, and inevitably whets my appetite to go back into the field again.

I have tried to address the most frequently asked questions, as well as those that seem pertinent for anyone considering becoming a scholar activist. Although I have tried to cover a sizable terrain in this letter, I would like to highlight some key themes and lessons. The first is simply recognizing that being a scholar activist is not always easy but is immensely rewarding. You will inevitably find yourself having to make difficult professional, ethical, and political choices and having to live with the consequences. This is never easy, but it is part and parcel of a rich life. Second, it is of the utmost importance that scholar activists pay attention to the rules and requirements of academia. It is imperative that you be fully aware of what is expected of you and that you make fully informed choices. You may decide that some institutional requirements are worth challenging, or you may decide to comply and direct your energies toward other goals. What is important is that *you* make the decision and that it is not made for you, or worse, that you were unaware of the expectations. There is certainly nothing wrong with deciding to leave academia (as a number of brave souls have done), but it is far preferable to leave on your terms.

A third lesson, which applies to all spheres of life, is the importance of living a life of reflection. Because becoming a scholar activist entails making difficult choices and acts of courage—particularly the determination to live your truth—it is essential that you be attentive to your emotions and thoughts and consider how they affect your attitudes, values, and behavior. Clarity in your actions will spare you a great deal of grief and allow you to be more open and direct with colleagues and comrades. Finally, as suggested above, the life of the scholar activist is not for the faint-hearted, weak, or nominally committed. The truth is that it takes fortitude and wisdom to live such a life. Fortitude is required to make unpopu-

lar decisions, to challenge both wisdom is necessary to ensure understand the consequences, and of. Living the life of the scholar world but also provides an aven

In Solidarity,
Laura Pulido

NOTES

Many thanks to Charlie Hale for all shortcomings.

1. For instance, the recently *peer* does not even mention *polit* refrain from engaging in *instit* Gold 2001, 146–49).

2. I do not mean to suggest th reasonable, or appropriate. In fact tory (Domosh 2000), and, thankf I have chosen not to take on th would be quite different.

3. One could argue, however, is an absence of commitment, reci

REFERENCES

- Behar, Ruth. 1993. *Translated V Story*. New York: Beacon Pr
- Bernstein, Aaron. 2004. "Can Tember 13.
- Bullard, Robert. 1993. *Confron Grassroots*. Boston: South E
- Domosh, Mona. 2000. "Uninte on the Job Search Process."
- England, Kim. 1994. "Getting I nist Research." *Professional Fujino, Diane. 2005. Heartbeat Kochiyama*. Minneapolis: L
- García, Mario. 1994. *Memorie: Bert Corona*. Berkeley: Uni
- Gilbert, Melissa. 1994. "The P 'Home.'" *Professional Ge*

lar decisions, to challenge both the powerful and the disenfranchised, and wisdom is necessary to ensure that you have weighed your options, understand the consequences, and are creating a life that you can be proud of. Living the life of the scholar activist not only helps to change the world but also provides an avenue to change yourself.

In Solidarity,
Laura Pulido

NOTES

Many thanks to Charlie Hale for his helpful comments. I remain responsible for all shortcomings.

1. For instance, the recently published *Chicago Guide to Your Academic Career* does not even mention political activism and in fact advises junior faculty to refrain from engaging in institutional politics (Goldsmith, Komlos, and Schline Gold 2001, 146–49).
2. I do not mean to suggest that the current “standards” of evaluation are fair, reasonable, or appropriate. In fact, they are extremely problematic and contradictory (Domosh 2000), and, thankfully, other scholar activists are challenging them. I have chosen not to take on this particular battle—perhaps if I had my story would be quite different.
3. One could argue, however, whether this is in fact scholar activism, as there is an absence of commitment, reciprocity, and accountability.

REFERENCES

- Behar, Ruth. 1993. *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story*. New York: Beacon Press.
- Bernstein, Aaron. 2004. “Can This Man Save Labor?” *Business Week*, September 13.
- Bullard, Robert. 1993. *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots*. Boston: South End Press.
- Domosh, Mona. 2000. “Unintentional Transgressions and Other Reflections on the Job Search Process.” *Professional Geographer* 52 (4): 703–8.
- England, Kim. 1994. “Getting Personal: Reflexivity, Positionality, and Feminist Research.” *Professional Geographer* 46 (1): 80–89.
- Fujino, Diane. 2005. *Heartbeat of Struggle: The Revolutionary Life of Yuri Kochiyama*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- García, Mario. 1994. *Memories of Chicano History: The Life and Narrative of Bert Corona*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gilbert, Melissa. 1994. “The Politics of Location: Doing Feminist Research at ‘Home.’” *Professional Geographer* 46 (1): 90–96.

of privileging particular
e informant end and my
e answers to these ques-
e circumstance. Indeed, it
ather, I wish to illustrate
e of my research—issues
ally so drained that I of-
n archival or theoretical
ch work, I find, restores
into the field again.

ked questions, as well as
g becoming a scholar ac-
e terrain in this letter, I
sons. The first is simply
always easy’ but is im-
yourself having to make
s and having to live with
t and parcel of a rich life.
lar activists pay attention
e imperative that you be
you make fully informed
requirements are worth
direct your energies to-
n make the decision and
re unaware of the expect-
iciding to leave academia
far preferable to leave on

life, is the importance of
olar activist entails mak-
ularly the determination
tentive to your emotions
attitudes, values, and be-
great deal of grief and al-
res and comrades. Finally,
vist is not for the faint-
uth is that it takes forti-
equiped to make unpopu-

- Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. 1993. "Public Enemies and Private Intellectuals: Apartheid USA." *Race and Class* 35 (1): 69-78.
- Gilmore, Ruth Wilson, and Craig Gilmore. 2003. "The Other California." In *Globalizing Liberation: How to Uproot the System and Build a Better World*, edited by David Solnit, 381-96. San Francisco: City Lights.
- Goldsmith, John, John Komlos, and Penny Schine Gold. 2001. *The Chicago Guide to Your Academic Career*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Healey, Dorothy Ray, and Maurice Isserman. 1993. *California Red: A Life in the Communist Party*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Honnayne-Sotelo, Pierrette. 1993. "Why Advocacy Research? Reflections on Research and Activism with Immigrant Women." *American Sociologist* 24 (Spring): 56-68.
- _____. 1994. *Gendered Transitions*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Houston, Donna, and Laura Pulido. 2002. "The Work of Performativity: Staging Social Justice at the University of Southern California." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20:401-24.
- Joseph, Miranda. 2002. *Against the Romance of Community*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Juris, Jeff. 2005. "Practicing Militant Ethnography within Movements against Corporate Globalization." www.euromovements.info/html/jeff-juris.htm. Accessed April 19, 2006.
- Kobayashi, Audrey. 1994. "Coloring the Field: Gender, Race and the Politics of Fieldwork." *Professional Geographer* 46 (1): 73-80.
- Meagher, Sharon. 1999. "The Academy on the Front Stoop: Theory, Community and Resistance." *Minnesota Review* 50/51:75-86.
- Merrifield, Andy. 2000. "The Urbanization of Labor: Living Wage Activism in the American City." *Social Text* 18:31-53.
- Milkman, Ruth. 2000. *Organizing Immigrants*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Morain, Dan. 2004. "California on Path to Becoming Nation's Gambling Capital." *Los Angeles Times*, August 25, A1, A24.
- Nagar, Richa. 2000. "Mujhe Jawab Do [Answer Me]: Feminist Grassroots Activism and Social Spaces in Chitrakoot India." *Gender, Place and Culture* 7 (4): 341-62.
- Omatsu, Glenn. 1994. "The 'Four Prisons' and the Movements of Liberation: Asian American Activism from the 1960s to the 1990s." In *The State of Asian America*, edited by Karin Aguilar-San Juan, 19-69. Boston: South End Press.
- Pulido, Laura. 1996a. "A Critical Review of the Methodology of Environmental Racism Research." *Antipode* 28 (2): 142-59.
- _____. 1996b. *Environmentalism and Economic Justice: Two Chicano Struggles in the Southwest*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- _____. 1998. "Development of the 'People of Color' Identity in the Environmental Justice Movement of the Southwestern U.S." *Sociologist Review* 96 (4): 145-80.
- _____. 2000. "Rethinking Environmental Development in Southern California." *American Geographers* 90 (1): 1-11.
- _____. 2003. "The Interior Life of the Interior West." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 21 (1): 46-52.
- _____. 2006. *Black, Brown, Yellow and Green: A History of Environmental Racism in Los Angeles*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Riedner, Rachel, and David Tritelli. 2003. "The Human Sciences: An Interview with Rachel Riedner." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 21 (1): 101-11.
- Routledge, Paul. 2003. "Rivers of Power and Ethics: A Dilemma of Power and Ethics." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 21 (1): 11-21.
73. Sangtin Writers and Richa Nagar. 2006. *Organizing Immigrants: A History of Social Movement Unionism in Los Angeles*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Scipes, Kim. 1992. "Understanding the Role of Social Movement Unionism in the Service Employees International Union." *Journal of Labor Research* 15 (4): 1-11.
- SEIU, Los Angeles.
- Tritelli, David, and Sharon Hansc. 2003. "An Interview with Al Winkler, Julie." 2000. "Faculty Research for Women." *Professional Geographer* 54 (4): 1-11.
- Zinn, Howard. 1999. *A People's History of the United States*. New York: HarperCollins.

Private Intellectuals:

- The Other California." In *Rem and Build a Better* Toledo: City Lights.
- Sold 2001. *The Chicago* University of Chicago Press.
- California Red: A Life in* inois Press.
- Research? Reflections on " *American Sociologist* 24
- University of California Press.
- rk of Performativity: Stag- California." *Environment*
- Community, Minneapolis:
- within Movements against info/html/jeff-juris.htm.
- ter, Race and the Politics of -80.
- It Sloop: Theory, Commu- 75-86.
- er: Living Wage Activism in
- aca: Cornell University
- ing Nation's Gambling
- er: Feminist Grassroots Ac- iender, *Place and Culture* 7
- Movements of Liberation: 1990s." In *The State of* in, 19-69. Boston: South
- thodology of Environ- -59.
- istice: *Two Chicano Strug-* izona Press.
- er Identity in the Envi- in U.S." *Socialist Review*

- _____. 2000. "Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90 (1): 12-40.
- _____. 2003. "The Interior Life of Politics." *Ethics, Place and Environment* 6 (1): 46-52.
- _____. 2006. *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Riederer, Rachel, and David Tritelli. 1999. "Writing, Pedagogy, and Activism in the Human Sciences: An Interview with Stanley Aronowitz." *Minnesota Review* 50/51:101-11.
- Routledge, Paul. 2003. "Rivers of Resistance: Critical Collaboration and the Dilemmas of Power and Ethics." *Ethics, Place and Environment* 6 (1): 66-73.
- Sangtin Writers and Richa Nagar. 2006. *Playing with Fire: Feminist Thought and Activism through Seven Lives in India*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Scipes, Kim. 1992. "Understanding the New Labor Movement in the Emergence of Social Unionism." *Critical Sociology* 19 (2): 81-101.
- Service Employees International Union, Local 399. 1995. "A Penny for Justice: Janitors and L.A.'s Commercial Real Estate Market." Working Paper, SEIU, Los Angeles.
- Tritelli, David, and Sharon Hanscom. 1999. "The Formation of an Activist Scholar: An Interview with Alan Wald." *Minnesota Review* 50/51:125-42.
- Winkler, Julie. 2000. "Faculty Reappointment, Tenure, and Promotion: Barriers for Women." *Professional Geographers* 52 (4): 737-50.
- Zinn, Howard. 1999. *A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present*. New York: HarperCollins.