

The Colonizer/Colonized Chicana Ethnographer: Identity, Marginalization, and Co-optation in the Field

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In this article, Sofia Villenas describes her experience of being caught in the midst of oppressive discourses of "othering" during her work as a Chicana ethnographer in a rural North Carolina Latino community. While Villenas was focusing on how to reform her relationship with the Latino community as a "privileged" ethnographer, she missed the process by which she was being co-opted by the dominant English-speaking community to legitimate their discourse of Latino family education and child-rearing practices as "problem." By engaging in this discourse, she found herself complicit in the manipulation of her own identities and participating in her own colonization and marginalization. Through her story, Villenas recontextualizes theories about the multiplicity of identities of the researcher. She problematizes the "we" in the literature of qualitative researchers who analyze their race, class, and gender privileges. Villenas challenges dominant-culture education ethnographers to move beyond the researcher-as-colonizer position and to call upon their own histories of complicity and marginalization in order to move toward new identities and discourses. Similarly, she calls upon ethnographers from marginalized cultures to recognize their position as border crossers and realize that they are their own voices of activism.

It is not easy to name our pain, to theorize from that location.

(hooks, 1994, p. 74)

Like a "mojado" [wetback] ethnographer, I attempt to cross the artificial borders into occupied academic territories, searching for a "coyote" [smuggler] to secure a safe passage.

(E. G. Murillo Jr., personal communication, 1995)

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What happens when members of low-status and marginalized groups become university-sanctioned "native" ethnographers of their own communities? How is this "native" ethnographer positioned vis-à-vis her own community, the majority culture, the research setting, and the academy? While qualitative researchers in the field of education theorize about their own privilege in relation to their research participants, the "native" ethnographer must deal with her own marginalizing experiences and identities in relation to dominant society. This "native" ethnographer is potentially both the colonizer, in her university cloak, and the colonized, as a member of the very community that is made "other" in her research.

I am this "native" ethnographer in the field of education, a first-generation Chicana born in Los Angeles of immigrant parents from Ecuador. Geographically, politically, and economically, I have lived under the same yoke of colonization as the Chicano communities I study, experiencing the same discrimination and alienation from mainstream society that comes from being a member of a caste "minority."¹ I share the same ethnic consciousness and regional and linguistic experiences. The commonly used terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" do not adequately describe who I am.² Racially and ethnically I am *indígena*, a detribalized Native American woman, descendant of the Quechua-speaking people of the South American Andes. Politically I am a Chicana, born and raised in the American Southwest, in the legendary territories of Aztlan.³ This story is about how these identities came into play in the process of conducting research with an emerging Latino community located in the U.S. South.

The Colonizer/Colonized Dilemma

Rethinking the political and personal subjectivities of researcher and ethnographer has in recent times pushed the boundaries of theorizing about the multiple identities of the researcher within the research context of privilege and power. Qualitative researchers in education have called for a reexamination of the raced, gendered, aged, and classed positions of the researcher with respect to

¹ "Chicano" and "Chicana" are self-identified terms used by peoples of Mexican origin. They are political terms of self-determination and solidarity that originated in the Chicano liberation movement of the 1960s.

² "Hispanic" is a U.S. government term used to classify Spanish-speaking peoples of Latin America living in the United States. "Latino" refers to a collective community of Latin Americans. "Latino" is my chosen term, which I use interchangeably with the emic term "Hispano." I use "Latino" to refer to the very diverse Spanish-speaking community of Hope City (a pseudonym), North Carolina. "Latino" also refers to male members of the community, while "Latina" refers to the women. Members of the Latino community in Hope City usually refer to themselves in national terms: Mexican, Salvadoran, Guatemalan, etc. However, they have also adopted the term "Hispanos" to refer to themselves collectively as a community. It is also important to note that people self-identify differently. For this reason, when I refer to my friends, I use the various terms with which they identify themselves. Also, an "Indigenista" or "Mesocentric" (Godina, 1996) perspective has spurred interest among Latinos and peoples of indigenous ancestry between themselves and tribal Native Americans. In essence, through this movement we (including myself) are saying that we *are* Native American people.

³ "Aztlan" refers to the mythical origins and ancient homelands of the Aztec civilization. Over the last thirty years, Aztlan has been popularized by the Chicano liberation movement and is linked to the vast northern territories of Mexico that were invaded and annexed by the United States in 1848.

the research participants (Fine, 1994; Lather, 1991; Roman & Apple, 1990). These researchers are also recognizing that they are and have been implicated in imperialist agendas (Pratt, 1986; Rosaldo, 1989) by participating in "othering" (Fine, 1994) and in the exploitation and domination of their research subjects (Roman & Apple, 1990).⁴

In the last decade, ethnographers and qualitative researchers have illuminated the ways in which the researched are colonized and exploited. By objectifying the subjectivities of the researched, by assuming authority, and by not questioning their own privileged positions (Crapanzano, 1986; Fine, 1994; Rosaldo, 1989; Van Galen & Eaker, 1995), ethnographers have participated as colonizers of the researched. Rosaldo (1989) uses the image of the "Lone Ethnographer" who once upon a time "rode off into the sunset in search of his 'natives'" (p. 30). After undergoing arduous fieldwork as his rite of passage, the Lone Ethnographer "returned home to write a 'true' account of the culture" (p. 30). In the texts of classic anthropology, people were depicted as "members of a harmonious, internally homogenous and unchanging culture" (p. 31), and written about in a way that "normalizes life by describing social activities as if they were always repeated in the same manner by everyone in the group" (p. 42). Rosaldo reminds us that this manner of objectifying people's lives has been the classic norm of ethnography, and that researchers have rarely asked what the researched think about how their lives are being interpreted and described in text.

Researchers are also implicated as colonizers when they claim authenticity of interpretation and description under the guise of authority. In a critique of Geertz's description of the Balinese cockfight, Crapanzano (1986) exposes the ways in which the event described is subverted and sacrificed to "a literary discourse that is far removed from the indigenous discourse of their occurrence" (p. 76). This discourse, according to Crapanzano, is ultimately masked by the authority of the author, "who at least in much ethnography, stands above and behind those whose experiences he purports to describe" (p. 76).

As ethnographers, we are also like colonizers when we fail to question our own identities and privileged positions, and in the ways in which our writings perpetuate "othering." As Fine (1994) explains:

When we write essays about subjugated Others as if *they* were a homogeneous mass (of vice or virtue), free-floating and severed from contexts of oppression, and as if we were neutral transmitters of voices and stories, we tilt toward a narrative strategy that reproduces Othering on, despite, or even "for." (1994, p. 74)

Moreover, we are like colonizers when, as Van Galen and Eaker (1995) point out, the professional and intellectual gatekeeping structures (e.g., university admissions to graduate studies, journal publication referees) from which we gain our legitimacy and privilege remain "highly inaccessible to those on whose behalf we claim to write" (p. 114).

⁴ "Othering" refers to objectifying people who are different than the Western White self in a manner that renders them inferior.

For example, women teachers of working-class backgrounds are expected to consume a body of literature that emanates from elite universities from which they are excluded, and that thus excludes them from the production of material used for the teaching profession and their own training. Fine (1994) and Van Galen and Eaker (1995) urge ethnographers to probe the nature of their relationship to those they write about.

While we continue to push the borders of the multiple, decentered, and politicized self as researcher, we continue to analyze and write about *ourselves* in a unidirectional manner as imperialist researchers (Rosaldo, 1989) and colonizers (Fine, 1994) in relation to the research participants. Yet, what about the researcher as colonizer *and* colonized? Here is my own dilemma: as a Chicana graduate student in a White institution and an educational ethnographer of Latino communities, I am both, as well as in between the two. I am the colonized in relation to the greater society, to the institution of higher learning, and to the dominant majority culture in the research setting. I am the colonizer because I am the educated, "marginalized" researcher, recruited and sanctioned by privileged dominant institutions to write for and about Latino communities. I am a walking contradiction with a foot in both worlds — in the dominant privileged institutions *and* in the marginalized communities. Yet, I possess my own agency and will to promote my own and the collective agendas of particular Latino communities. I did not even consider the multiplicity of self and identity and the nuances of what such consideration meant until I had to confront my own marginality as a Chicana researcher in relation to the dominant majority culture in the research setting. In the research context of power and domination, I encountered what it means to examine closely within myself the intersectedness of race, class, gender, and other conceptual notions of identity.

I am a Chicana doctoral student, and have been conducting research in a small rural community in North Carolina, which I have named Hope City. My research project involved the educational life histories of Latina mothers who were recent immigrants to Hope City. In the telling of their stories, the women defined education — how they experienced it in their lives as learners and teachers in families, communities, and schools, and how they constructed educational models for raising their own children. I spent over two years in Hope City, teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) at the local community college and in an after-school tutorial program for elementary-school-age Spanish-speaking children. I participated in family social gatherings, and in community and church events and meetings. I also had a lot of contact with the English-speaking community of professionals who were servicing Latino families in health care and education, joining them in meetings and informal gatherings. These professionals were also formally interviewed by other colleagues involved in the Hope City project. As a team, we were funded by a child development center to investigate the beliefs about education held by the agencies and schools serving the Hope City Latino community, and by the diverse Latino community members themselves. In my own research, I systematically analyzed the public sphere and the organization of relations of power in Hope City.

Through a historiographic analysis of the town's newspaper and through my observations and participant observations within the community of school and agency professionals, I found that the Latino community in Hope City was being framed as a "problem."

At the beginning of the research project, I was aware of the politics and privilege of my researcher role and my relation to the research participants. I was eager to experience the process of constructing meaning with the research participants. By talking with these Latina mothers about their beliefs and philosophies of child-rearing and education, as well as my own, I hoped to engage them in conversations about how they could create a dignified space for themselves and their families in a previously biracial community that was not accustomed to Latinos. I had vague ideas about community projects that I hoped would emerge from the research participants themselves. When I reflected later, these notions seemed arrogant, as if I thought I knew the hopes and aspirations of this Latino community. I realized I had to question all my assumptions about this southern Latino community, such as defining as problems certain aspects of their lives that, to them, were not problematic at all. I was certainly ready to learn from this Latino community, but in the process of seeking to reform my relationship with them, I failed to notice that I was being repositioned and co-opted by the dominant English-speaking community to legitimate their discourse of "Latinos as problem." In the course of working with Hope City's non-Latino school and service professionals, I discovered that while I engaged in a rethinking of my own politics and the processes of empowerment within the Latino community, I was hiding my own marginality in relation to the majority culture. I did not know then that I would have to scrutinize my own lived experiences as a Chicana daughter, mother, wife, and student in confronting the dominant community's discourses of "othering" and of difference.

In this article, I attempt to heed Fine's words in "unearthing the blurred boundaries between Self and Other" (1994, p. 72). Weis (1995) summarizes the discourse on colonialism, which takes as its central point the idea that the colonial "other" and the self (read the "Western White" self) are simultaneously co-constructed, the first being judged against the latter. Furthermore, Weis notes, "this process of 'othering' is key to understanding relations of domination and subordination, historically and currently" (p. 18). This article, then, speaks to the discourses of "othering" that jolted me out of my perceived unproblematic identity and role as a Chicana researcher in education, and into a co-construction of the "Western" self and the Chicana "other." This ongoing story involves my confrontation with my contradictory identities — as a Chicana researcher in the power structures of the dominant discourse of "other," and as a Chicana working with this marginalized Latino community. Through this story, I hope to recontextualize the ways in which qualitative researchers in education have theorized about identity and privilege to include the repositioning and manipulation of identities that can occur, particularly with native ethnographers. This recontextualization problematizes the ways in which qualitative researchers who seek to analyze privilege and the "situatedness" of each ethnographer fail to note

that we as ethnographers of education are not all the same “We” in the literature of privileged ethnographers. My standpoint as a Chicana and my historical relation to Latino communities mediate and complicate my “privilege.” Unveiling the ways in which the ethnographer is situated in oppressive structures is a critical task for qualitative researchers in the field of education. Even in new positions of privilege, the Chicana ethnographer cannot escape a history of her own marginalization nor her guilt of complicity.

Personal History

My encounter with discourses of difference and of “othering” as a child in Los Angeles neighborhoods and schools intensified my scrutinization of my own identity and role as a Chicana in academia. Growing up in Los Angeles, I was aware of racism. As a child, I acted out the effects of colonization, refusing to speak Spanish, emphasizing that I was South American and not Mexican, as Mexicans were relegated to second-class citizenship. I grew up knowing that my culture and language were not valued, but I did not suffer direct, blatant racism. I found safety in numbers, as there were many other Latinas, Chicanas, and Mexicans with whom I could hang out.

As I grew older, our peer group continually created and celebrated our Chicano/Latino cultures and languages. As an adult, I thought I had overcome the loss of self that comes with second-class relegation of the Spanish language and Latino cultures, and that I did not speak with the voice of a colonized person, one whose culture and language were devalued. Yet I was not as prepared for Eurocentric academia as I thought I was. In community, I had learned to manipulate my identities successfully and did not expect them to be manipulated by others. But such a manipulation is precisely what occurred when I began my professional university training in ethnographic research. At the university, I experienced the dilemma of creating my identity as a Chicana researcher in the midst of Eurocentric discourses of “other.” Being an ethnographer made my contradictory position more obvious, complex, and ironic. I recognize this contradiction now, but at the university, the discourse of “othering” did not begin with my research study.

An awakening of sorts occurred for me when I attended a seminar on topics in education. On that particular day, the topic was whether public single-population schools should exist. The readings for that week centered on public and private schools for women only, for gays and lesbians, and schools based on Afrocentric or Chicano-centric curriculum. Most of my fellow classmates argued that people should not be separated, reasoning that students should be integrated so that everybody could come together to talk about societal inequities and find solutions together. They argued that single population schools promoted separatism, and that through integrated schools, the Eurocentric curricula would be challenged. While I agreed that all people need to dialogue about oppression and work together to bring about social justice, and therefore was in favor of integrated schools, I did not agree that Afrocentric or Chicano-centric

curricula and schools promoted separatism. In trying to engage in the discussion, however, I began to feel uncomfortable. I tried to explain why I felt that disenfranchised groups had the right to these curricula if they wanted them and, furthermore, why I felt they were important and necessary. I argued that people who have been stripped of their cultures through public schooling need to come together and reclaim their cultures, histories, and languages, but although I believed this, I was nevertheless buying into the discourse of fear of separatism, saying that we needed to have separate spaces before coming together to be a part of the larger group. Of course, implicit in this argument was the idea that as people of color, we were going "to come together" to join the dominant culture and integrate ourselves within it, rather than challenge the notion of a single common culture.

The discourse of this group of fellow students and friends was so powerful that it disabled me. I explained my stance apologetically, acquiescing to the notion that we would have to come back and join a mainstream culture and society rather than challenge it. Everyone else was speaking as if they were detached and removed from the topic, rationalizing the logic of their arguments, but it was different for me. The topic was personal and deeply embedded in my experiences. In this conversation, I was not the subject anymore but the object, the "other." Using Cornell West's words, hooks (1990) writes that people often engage in debates that "highlight notions of difference, marginality, and 'otherness' in such a way that it further marginalizes actual people of difference and otherness" (p. 125). hooks likens these debates to reinscribing patterns of colonization: "When this happens . . . the 'Other' is always made object, appropriated, interpreted, taken over by those in power, by those who dominate" (1990, p. 125).

In this same manner, I felt that my experiences as a Latina going through the Eurocentric curriculum of public schools was being objectified and appropriated through a rationalized logical argument against Chicano- or Afrocentric schools. In the rational, logical arguments in that seminar, no space existed for my deeply passionate personal experience and voice, for me to argue for the right to choose to be with Latinas/os, for us to be educated together and to center our curriculum in our diverse roots and history, to find out about ourselves and to claim ourselves in our own terms. My classmates and I talked against oppressed groups coming together to form their own schools in a way that ignored the existence of race, class, and gender privileges among the class participants. In this discussion, an aura of disinterested, detached, scientific rationalism existed that rendered me voiceless and silenced. Ellsworth (1989) describes the oppression of rational argument as putting as its opposite the irrational "other" — for example, women and people of color. In schools, she said, the rational argument has become the "vehicle for regulating conflict and the power to speak" (p. 303).

After the group dispersed, I was left feeling stripped of my identity and angry with myself for betraying my own voice. I had fallen into the trap of the dominant discourse, trying to convince the group not to worry, that we would eventually

come around to integrating ourselves. But into what? I did not know, but it was implied that we would integrate ourselves into some core set of shared social and cultural ideals and belief systems, a core that evidently was the White, middle-class lifestyle. I was reminded again of Ellsworth's (1989) critique of critical pedagogy. She argues that the dialogue emphasized in critical pedagogy assumes that we could all engage in dialogue equally as if we were not raced, gendered, and classed persons with vested interests and different experiences. The seminar participants (including myself) failed to see how, in the process of discussing people of color, we silenced and marginalized the very voices of those who were supposed to have been the subjects and authors of their experiences — the voices of fellow Chicana and African American classmates.

I now realize that something else also occurred that afternoon in our seminar. The topic, as well as the disinterested, detached way in which the discussion was carried out, fueled what I wanted so desperately to express, but could not. I was the only Chicana there, and had to think and speak individualistically rather than collectively. I was without my Latino friends from home who shared the power of our activism in defying the colonization of our identities and of our people. In the absence of that collectivity, I changed my commitment and orientation from the visions my friends and I had shared. Cut off from those who collectively sustained them, I lost those visions of activism and self-determination. Deep inside, I wanted to voice what I was experiencing at that moment — the disempowerment that comes from being cut off from your own. Perez (1991), a Chicana feminist, writes what I wanted to express at that time:

You attempt to "penetrate" the place I speak from with my Chicana/Latina hermanas. I have rights to my space. I have boundaries. . . . At times, I must separate from you, from your invasion. So call me a separatist, but to me this is not about separatism. It is about survival. I think of myself as one who must separate to my space and language of women to revitalize, to nurture and be nurtured. Then, I can resurface to build the coalitions that we must build to make the true revolution — all of us together acting the ideal, making alliance without a hierarchy of oppression. (p. 178)

Only now, as I am writing these words, do I realize what was happening. It hit me and it hurt me. I felt it in my bones, but I could not articulate it until now. The coalitions referred to by Perez imply groups of empowered and self-identified peoples who do not have to pack neatly and put away their languages and cultures in order to comply with a "standard" way of being. To be Chicanas in the myriad and infinite ways there are of being, to come as we are, poses a threat to integrated schools and to mainstream society. In the absence of collectivity in my graduate seminar, I could not be true to my vision of a Chicana.

Revealing Tension in My Identity as a Chicana Researcher

As I look back, describe, and theorize about my seminar experience, I can articulate the elements that constituted my marginalization and my complicity in the discourses of difference and "othering." The power of the dominant dis-

course of “other,” the objectification of my experiences as the “other” through detached, rational argumentation, and the severing of a collective vision and memory that disabled me and rendered me voiceless, all constituted marginalization and complicity. These elements resurfaced when I started the process of conducting qualitative research with the Latino community in Hope City, North Carolina. There, my dilemma of being a Chicana and a researcher became problematic in ways similar to my experiences in the seminar, that is, as an accomplice to the marginalization and objectification of my identity and experiences as a Chicana, which became embedded in the power structure of the dominant and the disenfranchised.

Going into the field, my intent was to gain access to the Hope City Latino community so that I could interview Latina mothers about their beliefs on child-rearing and education, particularly as their narratives played out in the context of a changing rural southern town. Yet I did not want only to take their stories and leave. I also wanted to become involved in some way with their Latino community, either through bilingual tutoring for children with their mothers or through English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. As I sought to gain access to the community, I had to speak with numerous English-speaking institutional representatives, including educators in the elementary school, community college, and health department. From the beginning, I felt uncomfortable in my conversations with these community leaders and with their cultural views of Latino families, and of the women in particular. They constructed Latino families as “problems” tending towards violence, sexism, machismo, and low educational aspirations. In their meetings, well-meaning providers talked about showing Latina mothers models of proper child-rearing. A Hope City newspaper headline read, “Program Teaches Hispanics How to Be Better Mothers.” Other articles about Latino families carried headlines such as “Literacy Void.” Again, the dominant discourse concerning the “other” was powerful and overwhelming — so much so that I found myself, as in the seminar, participating in it as an accomplice. I began to talk the talk.

I remember accompanying an ESL instructor from the community college to the trailer park where he gave classes. We stood in the grassy area in the middle of the park, looking out at the individual trailers, some with children and families outside them. The instructor was giving me the rundown on their living conditions and other problems. I was nodding my head, all the while gazing at the people who looked back at us. I remember ducking my head, painfully aware of my awkward position. Whose side was I on? In participating in this manner with the instructor, I was, as hooks (1989) says, “one with them in a fellowship of the chosen and superior, [it was] a gesture of inclusion in ‘whiteness’” (p. 68), affirming that I had been assimilated. I felt uncomfortable, yet I participated, as in the graduate seminar, by betraying my anger and remaining silent, and by not challenging the discourse. In conversations with Hope City professionals, I had to choose my alignment in the power structure of the community — either with the leaders who were in positions to make policy, or with the disenfranchised Latino community.

Choosing to align myself with the dominant English-speaking leaders entailed sharing the same discourse and language to talk about the Latino community. To do this, I had to distance myself from the Latino community and the experiences I shared with them, and speak as the subject about the object. I could do this in the eyes of the dominant English-speaking community because I was formally educated and spoke English as well as they.

In this southern community, there were no other Chicanas/os in leadership positions. I had no one with whom to share a collective vision for the empowerment of "our" community. The ESL instructor and I spoke in a detached manner about the problems of "these people," as if I had not been socialized in a Latino family and immigrant community. I spoke as if Latino families and friends had not been the most important people in my private life. I silenced myself so that I could have further conversations with the community leaders who were the key to my accessing the educational institutions of the community. By participating in their discourse, I had to disengage myself from my experiences as an intimate participant in Latino families and communities. The dominant discourse of difference was powerful, and my experiences were again nullified through my participation in detached and rational discussions of the problems of the "other."

My uncomfortable feelings soon turned to outrage and hurt. One particular discussion with a school principal startled me out of my perceived unproblematic role as a Chicana researcher. My advisor and I went to speak with the principal about my starting a mother/child class to teach children how to read and write in Spanish. The principal, who held blatantly racist views of Latino families, told us he would play the devil's advocate and point out some problems — for example, how were we going to get mothers to come? He went on to say that we had to understand the Hispanic family. The man, he said, dictates, and the woman is subservient: "The man will not let her out of the house. They do not care about education and so it's hard to get the mothers to come to the school." An ESL teacher who was also in the room explained that these were poor people, blue-collar workers who did not have education themselves. I later responded angrily in my field notes:

How dare you say this to me. How is it that you are telling me what Latino families are like. I was so insulted. They were talking about my "raza" so negatively as if I were not Latina myself. This goes to show how easily I can "pass" and that in certain contexts, I am not identified as one of "them." With this conversation as in others, I have felt that I have had to put on a different persona in order to play along with well meaning racist discourse. I have felt very uncomfortable talking to benevolent people about the "other," the exotic poor people who need our help. "Our" referring to my complicity as researcher. (Field notes, March 1994)

After that incident, I began to question my identity and my role as a Chicana researcher. It was evident that the dominant English-speaking community did not consider me a Latina, like the women we were discussing, but a middle-class, educated woman of Spanish descent. How was I to relate to this dominant discourse of difference and "othering?"

I looked to recent works on the researcher's role in disenfranchised communities in which the researcher shares the same cultural background as the research participants. Delgado-Gaitan (1993) and Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba (1991) write about an ethnography of empowerment, a framework that "provides a broad sociocultural premise and possible strategy for studying the process of disempowerment and empowerment of disenfranchised communities" (p. 391). This kind of ethnography is based on a Freirian notion of self-awareness of the social and cultural context of the nature of oppression suffered by disempowered people (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991). Such a framework calls for "the construction of knowledge through the social interaction between researcher and researched with the fundamental purpose of improving the living conditions of the communities being researched" (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991, p. 392). Delgado-Gaitan (1993) emphasizes that the researcher shapes the research participants and their environment while, at the same time, the researcher is also shaped by the participants and the dynamics of their interactions. Delgado-Gaitan's (1993) own provocative story is of the transformation of her role with respect to her work on literacy practices in the homes and schools of a Latino community. As the parents mobilized to effect changes in the school, Delgado-Gaitan redefined her role as researcher to become involved as facilitator and informant in the process of community empowerment. As a result of her own unique experiences, Delgado-Gaitan, a Latina herself, built upon the notion of making problematic her relationship with Latino communities. By doing so, she put into practice qualitative researchers' call for the reexamination of one's identity and place within the research context of privilege and power.

My story extends this notion by problematizing the relationship between the marginalized researcher and the majority culture. The internalization of oppressive discourses relating to one's own people, especially as a product of institutionalized education and university training, can lead to a disempowerment of the researcher and the research process. The analysis can be extended then to include the empowerment of the researcher and the role of the ethnographer's culture, self-identity, and her/his raced, classed, and gendered experiences in the research process. In my case, while I naively looked for ways in which I could help Latina mothers "empower" themselves (see Le Compte & de Marrais, 1992, for a critique on the discourse on empowerment), I failed to realize that I needed to help myself become empowered vis-à-vis the dominant, English-speaking community. I needed to examine my own identity in the particular cultural arena that formed the context for my research study. Not having done so, I could not engage in the process of constructing knowledge with the research participants. I needed first to ask myself, How am I, as a Chicana researcher, damaged by my own marginality? Furthermore, how am I complicit in the manipulation of my identities such that I participate in my own colonization and marginalization and, by extension, that of my own people — those with whom I feel a cultural and collective connectedness and commitment?

For these reasons, researchers must examine how their subjectivities and perceptions are negotiated and changed, not only in relation to the disenfranchised

community as research participants, but also through interactions with the majority culture. In most cases, the latter are the people who espouse the dominant discourse of difference and “other,” that is, the cultural views of Latino families as a “problem” — poor, disadvantaged, and language deficient. In Hope City, Latina mothers are constructed as “at risk” in the discourse of the dominant community (i.e., professionals in education, health, and social services) so that the ways in which they raise and educate their children are devalued (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995). It is this “at risk” and “problem” discourse that I was being pushed hard to legitimate in Hope City. Yet this discourse concerned my own rearing, my own family, my own mother, and my own beliefs and those of my community. Through my engagement in the majority culture’s “Latinos as problem” discourse, I was further marginalized and encircled in my own guilt of complicity.

Identity, Tension and Power: Interpreting My Insider/Outsider Perspective

I find it useful to appropriate Delgado-Gaitan’s (1993) insider/outsider concept and apply it in a different manner to my emerging and changing identity as a Chicana researcher. In the process of conducting her study, Delgado-Gaitan (1993) learned that a researcher initially could only be an outsider to the community of research participants, but that with insight, the researcher could foster relational and reflective processes with their participants and in time become an insider. What are the particular behaviors and/or characteristics of the researcher that can make her/him an insider to the community of research participants? In a general sense, it is the sharing of collective experiences and a collective space with the research participants, such that the researcher is gradually accepted as a member of that particular community. As researchers, we can be insiders and outsiders to a particular community of research participants at many different levels and at different times.

In my case, I had two layers of communities to penetrate, at least on different terms. From my perspective at the time, the irony was that I was becoming an insider to the “wrong” community — the dominant, English-speaking community of leaders with whom I felt no familial, historical, or intimate relation. I was, in fact, the outsider to the Latino community of this town, since I was not of their community and did not share in their everyday experiences (I did not live in Hope City). Further, I was being recruited by the institutional representatives to become an insider in the legitimization of the dominant discourse of Latinos as “problem” and “victim.” The effects on me of participating in the dominant discourse in a detached manner through rational dialogue were powerful. Consequently, I had to step back and negotiate internally the ongoing recruiting efforts of the dominant, English-speaking community leaders to their discourses of difference.

I began my fieldwork on site at the beginning of the spring semester of the academic year. I discussed with my advisor how the White community might be

cautious in talking with me about the Latino community, since I might be perceived as a member of this community. As I stated earlier, my advisor and I were soon proven wrong. The White community leaders were eager to talk to me about their perceptions of Latino families.

I had worked hard all semester to gain access to the Hope City Latino community and to find a niche in which to practice my profession of "maestra" (teacher), and to do research as well. My diligence paid off in that many opportunities were opened for me by English-speaking community leaders. I had received invitations to teach ESL and literacy in the churches (both the Catholic and Methodist churches), the elementary school, the community college, and the health department.

I decided to dedicate my time to teaching ESL to adults at the community college, a job in which I not only had experience but that I also thoroughly enjoyed. At the end of the semester, I looked to see what my story in terms of my research had been thus far. I had written in my field notes about my uneasy and uncomfortable feelings as I had conversations with English-speaking community leaders. Interestingly, I had also recorded my feelings of awkwardness when I talked to Latinas/os as a researcher researching "them." I was unconsciously documenting the power relations that defined the research context of which I, the dominant community leaders, and the Latino immigrant community each formed a part. Roman and Apple (1990) emphasize that a crucial task for the ethnographer should be the "elaboration of the structural power relations that formed the basis for conducting the field research and the study" (p. 60). The documentation of my feelings of anger and awkwardness formed the basis for the elaboration of my identity as a Chicana researcher in the community's power structure.

The power play in the recruitment efforts of the White power structure, and later in their efforts to appropriate me, was clearly evident. To recruit me to their discourse and narratives of difference, the community leaders had to view me as equal with them in the power structure. They appropriated my persona and appeared, at least initially, to welcome me as an equal.

I later understood this welcome to be a form of colonizing. They appropriated my persona by presuming shared assumptions of a body of experiences. For example, a community college instructor warned me about the dangers of the trailer park, implying that I shared his fear of poor people and of people of color. The community leaders also treated me as an equal by talking about Latinos as the "other" and including me in the distanced and detached conversations about the "problems of Latinos." Sharing our detached, rational observations of Latinos made me seem objective and scientific, and seemed to put us on equal footing with each other and in a superior position to the Latino community.

I felt powerful because I could discuss "their" problems. I was even in a position to negotiate power with the elementary school principal when I proposed Spanish tutoring classes for young children and their mothers. Not only did my credentials give me leverage in these negotiations, but my professional identity

and language also met the criteria for inclusion and commonality with the institutional representatives. In more ways than one, I found it easier to be an insider to the community of dominant English-speaking leaders than to the Latino community.

The powerholders' recruiting efforts were intense precisely because they had a lot at stake in interpreting, structuring, and legitimating their cultural constructions of difference and diversity. The schools and agencies were interpreting Latino "cultures" and child-rearing practices. They were structuring the relationships between the Latino and English-speaking communities through the mediating force of agency bureaucracies (see Adkins, Givens, McKinney, Murillo, & Villenas, 1995). And, they were legitimating the "at risk" and "problem" discourses.

Undoubtedly, as a "Hispanic" professional, I served to legitimate the "at risk" discourse and the definition of Latino child-rearing as a "problem." Sleeter (1995) argues that "the discourse over 'children at risk' can be understood as a struggle for power over how to define children, families, and communities who are poor, of color, and/or native speakers of languages other than English" (p. ix).

In later months, community leaders called on me to speak about and for the Latino community. In their eyes, I was the "expert" on the educational experiences of Latino families, not because I had begun talking with Latina mothers and could possibly articulate their points of view, but because I was seen as the professional who possessed formal education, teaching experience, and spoke both Spanish and English. Indeed, they would introduce me not only by name, but also by my academic credentials and past teaching experience. On one occasion, I was asked to speak to a group of community leaders from various social service agencies about Latino families and their educational needs. I chose to speak about the strengths of language and literacy socialization in Latino families. On another occasion, I was asked to translate for and represent the Latinas from my ESL class at a meeting to organize a county chapter of a council for women. At yet another meeting, called by the county migrant education office, about one hundred Latino parents met in the elementary school cafeteria where I spoke to them about strategies to help their children in school. On all of these occasions, I was serving as the broker for and the link to the Latino community for the professional community leaders. They called on me to participate in meetings and to give presentations. The stakeholders of this community clearly felt an urgent need to co-opt certain people, such as myself and other English-speaking town leaders, to represent the Latino community. It was as if in doing so, they did not have to handle the raw material. The Latino community was too foreign, too different, too working class, too brown; so they appropriated me, Sofia, the preprocessed package, wrapped in formal education and labeled in English.

Of course I did not want to be associated with the dominating power structure in the eyes of the Latino community. I had qualms about being perceived as the imperialist researcher. I felt tension with the Latino community when I was in

my role as researcher, and when they saw me in company and complicity with the community leaders. I am reminded of two situations in which I felt these tensions most acutely.

It felt normal and comfortable, for example, when I visited Tienda Adrian (Adrian's Store), a Latino food store, with my husband and children. We spoke with the store owners in Spanish, asking about the town. However, the following week I felt uncomfortable when I revisited Tienda Adrian with my advisor and approached the store owners cloaked in my university researcher role to ask about the town. Similarly, I felt the tension of power in my researcher role when I began formal interviews with the women in the Latino community. The interviewing situation was uncomfortable for me, in contrast to the times we had engaged in informal talks about raising and educating children in Hope City.

I felt the tension of power and complicity even more directly when I engaged in social interaction with an English-speaking institutional representative and a Latina client at the same time. I felt this more acutely when service agency providers used English to talk about Latina clients in their presence. The Latina clients, who, for the most part, were new arrivals in Hope City, could not speak English. One particular service provider had the habit of introducing me to a Latina client and then giving me her personal life history right in front of her. In these situations, power was wielded through language, and English became the language of exclusion. The women's personal lives were presented to me like an open book in a language that they did not understand. In having to respond in English to the service provider, I was self-conscious and awkward about the exploitation and "othering" of the women. I did not want to be complicit with the "colonial administrator," but I was unaware that this was how I was being positioned.

My feelings of complicity and guilt, however, led me to engage in small spontaneous subversive strategies and acts of resistance. Any time a community leader spoke in English about a Latina client in her presence, I translated. Sometimes I would change the meanings somewhat so as not to cause embarrassment or hurt. On one occasion, for example, I said, "He's saying that you had gone through some rough times," even though the service agency provider said that she had had a nervous breakdown and had psychological problems. I began to translate into Spanish everything I said to community leaders when Latinos were present.

I also brought politics and subversion to the meetings at which I spoke for the community leaders. I did not always say what they wanted to hear, stirring controversy at one meeting and causing some Whites to react defensively at another. At one meeting at the elementary school, I disrupted the discourse of dominance by not accepting the seat they had saved for me in the front of the room facing the Latino audience. Instead, I took a seat among some Latino friends.

As an ESL instructor, a "maestra," in the Latino community, I am more active in dialogue and discussions with my Latino students than with the community of school and agency professionals. In being able to name and identify the

situatedness of my identities, I am beginning to react to my positioning and act towards a transformation of my identity and role as a Chicana educational researcher in a Latino community.

Negotiating Identities: Toward New Discourses

I am in the process of my own learning, and it is not my goal to arrive at a final resolution. Rather, I am in continual discovery. Identity and self are multiple and continually remade, reconstructed, reconstituted, and renewed in each new context and situation (Stone, 1992). When I left Los Angeles to attend graduate school in the South, I also left behind identities formed against the backdrop of a segregated city and against a historical context of the racial subordination and conquest of Native and Mexican peoples. In my limited and segregated experiences, I only knew Whites as living the middle-class lifestyle, and rarely as working-class people. I defined myself and was defined by this historical relationship.

In North Carolina, at first I believed I had encountered a place where a historically embedded antagonism did not exist between Mexicans and European Americans, as it exists in the Southwest. There is no territorial Alamo to remember, nor a U.S.-Mexico treaty that appropriated one-third of Mexico's land. I seemed to have forgotten the history of the genocide of American Indians and of the slavery and segregation of African Americans. Nevertheless, I believed space existed in which I could enter into new relationships with the majority culture and define new grounds and new terms. Because of this belief, I found it painful to go into the town where I was to conduct my research project, a town where a new immigrant community of Latinos were the objects of oppressive discourses. The old relationships and identities formed against these discourses were being re-inscribed in me. In confronting these oppressive discourses of difference, I experienced domination and oppression, and was a party to the exercising of them.

This story demonstrates that some Chicanas/os do not move from marginalization to new positions of privilege associated with university affiliation, as if switching from one seat to another on the bus. We do not suddenly become powerful in our new identities and roles as university researchers. We do not leave one to get to the other. As Chicanas/os and ethnographers of color, we carry our baggage with us — a baggage of marginalization, complicity, and resentment, as well as *orgullo* (pride) and celebration. These are not easily cast away. No doubt it is not too difficult to embrace whole-heartedly the privileges of upward mobility, but to many of us the costs are great. Just as becoming raceless was a strategy for Black adolescents who, in Fordham's (1988) study, had to unlearn their racial identities and cultural behaviors in order to make it through high school and beyond, so must some Chicanas/os do the same. As bilingual, tricultural peoples, we "continually walk out of one culture and into another" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 77). In Anzaldúa's images, we are straddling multiple worlds, trying to break from colonized identities formed against White

supremacy and male dominance and to form a new consciousness: "I am in all cultures, at the same time" (p. 77). We learn to tolerate contradictions and ambiguities of identities and to "seek new images of identities, new beliefs about ourselves" (p. 87).

While I recognize that part of my ongoing process is seeking, forging, and negotiating new images and identities, I am also raging against postmodern renderings of the White middle-class "discovery" that politically and socially situate the ethnographer as synonymous with colonizer, imperialist, and privileged researcher. In this view, it does not matter whether we are Chicanas/os or middle-class White male ethnographers. In the name of a postmodern understanding of identity and privilege, I am led to believe that I am now the same "researcher as colonizer," that I am now privileged, and that I share the same guilt for the same exploitation of the less privileged research participants. In a sense, I was not only being recruited to legitimate the majority culture's discourse of "Latinos as problem," but I am also symbolically being co-opted to legitimate academia's declaration of the postmodern ethnographer as the socially and politically privileged colonizer. In both instances, I am being co-opted to be like the colonizer, the oppressor, in ways that ignore my own struggle as a Chicana against subjugation and marginalization.

Thus, while I recognize my contradictory position and privilege (that come from university affiliation), and while I would gladly serve as a facilitator and translator for the voices of the Latina mothers of a small rural town in North Carolina (if they would have me), I must also see myself as going beyond the role of facilitator. I must see my own historical being and space. I must know that I will not "mimic the colonizers" (Perez, 1991, p. 177) and call myself the ethnographer/colonizer, for this insults my gendered, racial memory.

As I look back on my experience in the graduate seminar, I know that in the future I will not be silent, just as I could not be silent any more in the face of the dominant community's attempts to recruit me to their discourses about the Latino population in Hope City. I cannot continue to pretend that as a qualitative researcher in education, I am distanced from intimacy, hope, anger, and a historical collectivity with Latino communities. For these reasons, I cannot be neutral in the field, because to be so is to continue to be complicit in my own subjugation and that of the Latino communities. To take on only the role of facilitator is to deny my own activism. I must recognize that my own liberation and emancipation in relationship with my community are at stake, and that continued marginalization and subjugation are the perils.

I did not seek these confrontations and realizations. They came upon me while I was turned the other way, disengaging myself from the intimacy of Latina sisterhood. They came upon me as I convinced myself that I had to be careful because I was the privileged and thus the colonizer. I was attuned to seeking to reform my relationship with the research participants and to promote their empowerment, without realizing that I was being worked on and commodified, that I needed to be empowered. I suddenly found myself complicit in my own subjugation, vis-à-vis the dominant public discourse.

In the meantime, I find hope in Fine's (1994) narrative of the way her Latina niece, who was adopted into her middle-class Jewish family, moved in and out of identities as she fought a criminal case for sexual assault. Fine writes:

Jackie mingled her autobiography with our surveilled borders on her Self and the raced and gendered legal interpretations of her Other by which she was surrounded. She braided them into her story, her deposition. . . . She slid from victim to survivor, from naive to coy, from deeply experienced young woman to child. In her deposition she dismantled the very categories I so worried we had constructed as sediment pillars around her, and she wandered among them, pivoting her identity, her self representations, and, therefore, her audiences. (1994, p. 71)

Herein I find the key: to resist "othering" and marginalization is to use our multiplicity of identities in order to tolerate and welcome the contradictions and ambiguities, as Anzaldúa (1987) writes, so that in our quest for liberation, we also dismantle the categories and the conquering language of the colonizer. In this manner, we "work the hyphen between Self and Other," as Fine (1994, p. 72) challenges us to do, yet we work from within ourselves as the Self/Other, Colonizer/Colonized ethnographer.

Thus, it is important to continue theorizing on the researchers' multiplicity of identities and the implications of this for qualitative research in education. As members of marginalized groups assume more privileged positions in the educational socioeconomic structures of hierarchy, people who were once merely the exotic objects of inquiry are now the inquirers — the ones formulating and asking the questions. As some enter the ranks of teachers, administrators, and scholars, we are becoming the enforcers and legitimators as well as the creators of official knowledge. Hence, as qualitative researchers in the field of education, we need to explore and understand the dilemmas created for Chicanas/os, African Americans, Native Americans, and scholars from other disenfranchised groups vis-à-vis the majority culture. We scholars/activists of color need to understand the ways in which we manipulate our multiple, fluid, clashing, and colonized identities and how our identities are manipulated and marginalized in the midst of oppressive discourses. Luke and Luke (1995) argue, "Only by describing and understanding how power works in oppressive social formations, how identity is shaped both through contestation and collusion with oppressive regimes of control, is it possible to lay down a systematic knowledge of marginal identities" (p. 376).

Further studies are also needed that capture the intricacies of marginalized teachers and scholars who are teaching and researching their own communities. Watson-Gegeo (1994) introduces a collection of articles that illuminate important questions dealing with "minority" teachers teaching "minority" students.⁵

⁵ This edited collection includes articles by Foster (1994) on the views of African American teachers who counter prevailing hegemonic beliefs about African American children in reform efforts to improve their achievement in schools; Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo (1994) on the ways in which a history of colonization and modernization in the Solomon Islands serves to keep teachers' cultural knowledge out of the classroom; and Lipka (1994), who examined how Yup'ik Eskimo teachers in Alaska face administrative barriers when working to include their language and culture in their classrooms.

These excellent studies encourage further probing of the questions of resisting, negotiating, and tolerating identities in a context of power and privilege — in other words, to pay close attention to how we manipulate our identities and how our identities are manipulated by others. We need to see how Latino ethnographers, for example, become commodified in the process of research. At the same time, we also need to examine the gender, race, and class dynamics created in the university setting, where for example women of color, who are professors, and middle-class White students come together (see Vargas, 1996). These are critical questions that need further exploration.

Conclusion

This story is an attempt to untangle my own multiplicity of identities played out in the terrains of privilege and power in ethnographic research. With the new generation of “native” ethnographers, including myself, increasingly working within and writing about our own communities, we are beginning to question how our histories and identities are entangled in the workings of domination as we engage the oppressive discourses of “othering.” In my case, while researching in a rural town in North Carolina, I had to confront both my own marginalization and my complicity in “othering” myself and my community, as I encountered the discourse that identified Latino family education and child-rearing practices as “problem” and “lacking.”

At a time when qualitative researchers in education are questioning their own privilege in relation to the research participants, the “we” in the literature needs to be re-theorized. My identity/role as a Chicana ethnographer cannot be collapsed in terms of “privileged” researcher in the same manner that other ethnographers are privileged in their relationships with their research participants. In failing to address the ways in which the ethnographer can be damaged by her/his own marginalization in the larger society, the literature has created a “we” that does not include my experience in the field as a Chicana ethnographer.

What might this story teach majority-culture ethnographers of education so that they too move beyond the “researcher as privileged” dilemma? I believe they also can confront their own multiplicities of identity and histories of complicity and mark the points of their own marginalization. Rosaldo (1989) and Patai (1991) write that ethnographers cannot escape their complicity in exploiting the “researched,” yet I still need to ask, What is the nature of the space that I have found, and what are the possibilities for the Latino community in Hope City, North Carolina? My space is a fluid space of crossing borders and, as such, a contradictory one of collusion and oppositionality, complicity and subversion. For “Hispanos” in Hope City, surrounded by a historically violent and entrenched biracial society in which one is either Black or White, emancipatory possibilities lie in the creation of a dignified public space where they can negotiate new identities and break down the biraciality. Likewise, my challenge to majority-culture ethnographers is that they call upon their own marginalizing experiences and find a space for the emergence of new identities and discourses in the practice of solidarity with marginalized peoples.

My own journey moves me towards new transcendent discourses that are transformative and emancipatory. I hope to be, in Olson and Shopes's words, a "citizen-scholar-activist(s) rooted in the community" (cited in Van Galen & Eaker, 1995, p. 120). Recognizing our multidimensional identities as colonizers, colonized, neither, and in-between, we *camaradas* in struggle must work from within and facilitate a process where Latinas/os become the subjects and the creators of knowledge. My answer to the ethnographer-as-colonizer dilemma is that I will not stop at being the public translator and facilitator for my communities, but that I am my own voice, an activist seeking liberation from my own historical oppression in relation to my communities. We *mojado* ethnographers look anxiously to learn about the rich diversity of Latino communities in the U.S., and in doing so, create our own rich diversity of models, paradigms, and languages as we cross between our communities and "the artificial borders into occupied academic territories" (E. G. Murillo Jr., personal communication, 1995).

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