

CHAPTER 1

LA MIGRA

“*M-I-I-G-R-A-A-A-A-a-a!*” A fast-decaying echo followed the scream. It was the kind of echo where you can hear the sound waves buzzing in your ear.

Feet scurried all around; creeping under bushes, jumping over rocks, then frozen in mid-step behind cocked-open dumpsters. Hoping that the Border Patrol agent would pass them by, the immigrants held their breath, shoulders tense and armpits hollowed. The agent brushed aside weeds and grasses with her foot, counting backward quietly to herself. Leaves rustled, and a soft in-breath drew her eyes through a thicket and met them in a sustained gaze. Sergio knew it was over. He looked down and emerged defeated without a word. One by one the immigrants were found until only one remained. Time was running out. A bell’s vibrato finally clamored.

“OK, fine, I give up!” huffed Laura, the designated border patrol agent. Yadzmin, the smallest of the “immigrants,” only thirteen, had slipped between a candy machine and the wall. She came out yelling “I WO-ON! I get to be the Border Patrol tomorrow! *Lero-lero, candi-lero!* And YOU all have to be the immigrants and I’m going to get all of you! Nyah-nyah, nyah-nyah!” A twist of her hip marked victory and the end of recess as she skipped toward PE class.

Children’s games often go unnoticed. I knew that as I watched them play that day. Only later do we reflect on them as diagnosis and prophecy: *ring-around-the-rosie* acted out the plague that killed more than a third of medieval Europe.¹ This time a playful cops-and-robbers chase, which the children called “*migra-tag*,” sprang alongside the referendum polls in California that year. Proposition 187, also known as “Save Our State” or SOS, had been introduced by then-Governor

Pete Wilson in the summer of 1995, and rumors swirled around the immigrant communities for months. Although everyone talked about what the impact of the proposition might be, somehow we underestimated it, thinking that it was a fringe conservative movement. We thought it would never pass. Proposition 187 sought (and eventually passed and resulted in) the denial of social services to undocumented immigrants; public education and Medicaid were the main targets of the proposition. Other less expensive social benefits were also casually included, like an afterthought: well-baby (prenatal and postnatal) care, emergency room visits, and school lunches. Proposition 187 passed in November of 1995, approximately one year after the beginning of this project. Any undocumented immigrants that were caught using social services could be summarily deported. That included a large proportion of the Latina and Latino students at Sor Juana High School (SJHS).

On the way to gym class Yadzmin found Lucia, Tanya, and Cristina, *las niñas Fresas* (lit. “strawberry girls”: a Mexican Spanish slang term for a young person from the urban, middle-class, predominantly European-descent elite), and stopped to talk to them. They were getting ready for dance class, stretching on the wooden dance floor in their black leotards and tights. Mr Jones the dance teacher walked by on his way to the lockers. When he saw the girls he sang ridiculously, “Chiqui-ta Ba-na-na.” The girls looked up with quizzical expressions and parroted back, “Chiquita Ba-NA-na!”

“¿Qué onda? (*What’s with him?*)” Lucia wanted to know.

“¿Quién sabe? (*Who knows?*) I have no idea why he always says that to us,” said Tanya.

There was no way that the recently-arrived immigrant girls could ever have heard the commercial jingle that now looped in the back of my head. The ditty was introduced in 1945, when United Fruit Company unloaded its last military cargo and sent its fleet of ships to the Caribbean to harvest bananas. *Chiquita Banana* was a mass-marketing campaign aimed at entertaining war-weary Americans and familiarizing them with a new fruit from the Caribbean. Who would have thought bananas would become ubiquitous? At its peak, the song was played over 350 times a day on the radio, and Miss Chiquita, the ripe banana made flesh, was such a celebrity that UFC changed its name to Chiquita Brands. Around the same time, Carmen Miranda became not only the archetypal Latin sexpot but the highest-paid woman in the US at the time, linking Latinas, bananas, and big business.



Figure 1.1 Carmen Miranda: The South American way.

. . . Hell-o A-mi-gos!
I'm Chiquita Banana and I've come to say
Bananas have to ripen in a certain way
When they are fleck'd with brown and have a golden hue
Bananas taste the best and are the best for you!
[. . .]
But, bananas like the climate of the very, very tropical equator
So you should never put bananas in the refrigerator . . .
Music © 1945 Shawnee Press Inc.

There were other variations of the song, with the main character shown in commercials first as an animated banana, emerging like a Botticelli Venus from the peel, and eventually personified by a long line of Latina women (and one Italian-American) with Miranda-esque ripe fruit head-dresses and Brazilian-Bahiana outfits.² The South American bombshell swept the country!

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I'm Chiquita Banana and I've come to say
 To a fellow's heart the stomach is the way
 It's an ancient formula you must admit,
 And we'll put it to the test with a banana split!
 There's some ice cream in the freezer
 That was purchased yesterday,
 These bananas that I'm holding
 are so flecked and ripe and golden . . .
 "Oh I think I see a beauty,"
 "She's a honey,"
 "How'd we miss her?!"
 "And her banana splits are something
 that makes me want to kiss her."

"Norma, what does that mean, when he says Chiquita Banana?" the girls insisted. "I don't know," I lied. I was hoping that the angry flush spreading forward from my ears would not give me away.

At the time, I thought I knew. But to tell the truth, now I'm not quite sure why Mr Jones said that. Maybe it was just a fleeting moment captured on tape. A female schoolteacher from Texas who heard my recording of the incident claimed the moment was too small, too fleeting to make a big deal. Another friend, a Spanish immigrant to England, had a gut reaction: totally offensive. It reminded him of when he was a kid and the English children taunted him, yelling "Spanish Onion!" when he walked by. He could never figure it out, and for years he kept asking himself, *onions: WHY onions?* Twenty minutes after recounting this he came back and told me that he thought the Chiquita Banana comment was ambiguous. Maybe the teacher had no other way to relate. He didn't speak Spanish, after all. Maybe he understood Chiquita to be a diminutive, endearing somehow. There was just no way to know. Which is just as well because I didn't say anything at the time.

The Meaning of Dancing: Banda and Rock En Español as Class Codes

A few weeks after this incident Lucía and Tanya invited me to a Fresa party, held on a Saturday afternoon in a spacious rented party room at the Fox and Hound apartments. It was Tanya's fourteenth birthday, and half the teenage boys were sullenly playing cards and munching

on pretzels, while the rest were nuzzling their girlfriends into the corners of the party room, done up in shades of forest green and maroon. I had brought some chocolate-chip cookies that my boyfriend Rob had baked – Jose and Domingo, the basketball-obsessed twins from Guadalajara, said “¡Esos Gringos! (*Those Americans!*)” and laughed: I think they were amused at the thought that the American boyfriend not only lived with me – in subtle ways I found out they disapproved of this – but even took orders to bake cookies. Tanya’s mom had made a big chocolate cake. The girls at the party brought fruit salad and other small snack foods, and sodas. There was no alcohol, and at some point we played musical chairs. Pretty sedate really for my idea of a teenage party, and nothing like the blowout Alice in Wonderland drug-themed parties the wealthy Sor Juana High School jocks flippantly described and ranked in the school newspaper.

Tanya had dressed up as the *rockera* she aspired to be, with her curly brown hair down to the middle of her back; jeans, a white t-shirt, a belt with little silver spikes, and a black jeans vest. She was DJ on a boombox someone had brought (yes, back in the 1990s there were still boomboxes), and she was playing Rock en Español, but accepting requests for techno and a little bit of house music. Rancheras (Mexican country music), banda (polkas), and especially cumbias with their tropical rhythms were totally out of the question. In a later interview, Tanya explained:

TANYA: No es por insultar a nadie ¿no? bueno porque se sientan mal o algo así pero, o sea, yo la verdad, Banda solamente una vez escuché en una película [risa]. Y era una película de un pueblito, ¿ves? O sea, uno que es de ciudad, pus, no va allá en algo de, de un pueblito, no? No sé si te has dado cuenta que los únicos que bailan Banda son los de los barrios. Ahí de, de donde yo vivía, pus no se acostumbraba eso ¿ves? A mí me gusta Rock en Español, así Tecno, y no sé, o sea, tú sabes no, como que un estilo más americano aunque sea en español.

TANYA: *I don't mean for this to insult anyone OK? Like to make anyone feel bad, but the truth is that Banda, I only heard it once before, and it was in a movie [laughter]. And it was a movie about a little town. I mean, when you are from the city, you just aren't going to go for things from a little town. I don't know whether you've noticed that the only ones who dance Banda are the ones from the barrios. Where I lived, we were just not used to that. I like Rock en Español, Techno, you know, a style that is more American although it is in Spanish.*

Despite Tanya's insistence that Banda songs not be played at the party, I knew Güera liked Banda. Güera was from the high plains of Michoacán, a rural area of central-west Mexico where young people were not swept up in Americanized rock music. I listened to Banda when riding in Güera's car; she'd brake to the rhythm of it while I watched the pavement go by at my feet where the passenger side floorboard should have been. And she could dance Banda too, her long hair sweeping the floor as she hung backward, supported by her partner's arm in athletic dips. I had seen Güera dancing once with Junior, back when they were boyfriend and girlfriend and still spoke to each other.

I think Güera and Junior broke up partly because of the Piporro divide. Güera was a Piporra, a girl from the countryside whose family back in Mexico worked on a ranch. Tanya, a middle-class Fresa from the big city of Puebla, clearly looked down on anything from the Mexican countryside merely because it was rural and un-modern. Junior was not a Fresa, he was from a working-class background, but like Tanya he was from an urban area and similarly derided Piporros. In addition, Junior had gone and joined the Sureño gang, which claimed allegiance to the much more abstract "South," leaving very little room for the exploration of other communities. I think the low-grade annoyance of Piporro put-downs eventually got on Güera's nerves, straining relations with both Junior and Tanya.

Some time after the Güera/Junior breakup, I interviewed Junior and he expanded on Tanya's association of Banda music with rurality, linking it directly to the Piporros.

JUNIOR: Banda es música de Piporro. Me gustará bailarla pero por orgullo no la escucho.

Banda is the music of Piporros. I might like to dance it but out of pride I don't listen to it.

NORMA: Por orgullo de qué?

Pride of what?

JUNIOR: De que no seas Piporro.

Of not being a Piporro.

NORMA: Qué quiere decir Piporro?

What does that mean, Piporro?

JUNIOR: Un Piporro es una persona de rancho, bajado del monte, que oye tamborazos. Un indio! Que se dedica a crecer vacas, chivos!

A Piporro is a person who is from a ranch, who's come down from

the hills, who listens to big-drum music (Banda). An indio! Who raises cows and goats for a living!

“Güera” means blonde in Spanish, and this was unusual for a Piporra; as Junior mentioned, prototypical Piporros are thought to be of indigenous extraction. Güera was unusual in another way: she spoke totally fluent English from being a circular migrant, though she was still somehow placed in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. When I first met her, I thought she might be from Russia, another common point of origin for young people in the ESL classes. She had wavy, very long white-blond hair, with sprayed-stiff “clam shell” bangs. For the party at the Fox and Hound apartments she had replaced her blue bandanna ponytail holder with a black satin ribbon, and the ponytail sprouted as usual from the top of her head. She wore a black satin shirt tucked into green jeans with black high-top sneakers. No blue today, no gang colors. I guessed she was trying to fit in with the Fresas. Tanya the would-be Rockera Fresa could be very disapproving of Güera’s clothes, of her music, and especially of her boyfriends. She had hated Junior.

What Would You Do If Your Boyfriend Was Into Gangs?

At the party Güera told me that her new boyfriend Alejandro was in jail. She spoke to me in Mexican Rural Spanish code-mixed with English.

“Why is he in jail?” I asked her.

“He got in a fight with this guy, but that’s not why he is in jail; the cops thought he was trying to steal something but he was only trying to get in a fight with some fool that insulted him.” She caught her breath. “No fue su culpa. (*So it wasn’t his fault.*) Anyway he’s in jail, he’s been there two months and has three to go but he sent me a Valentine’s Day card. Look.”

Güera produced an envelope that had a reluctant bit of white space left on it, just enough to write her address. The rest of the envelope was given to an elaborate drawing, where a man with a hairnet and a tear tattooed on his cheek kissed the disembodied hand of a woman, chivalrously, Cinderella-style. He seemed to be floating in the kiss, eyes closed, and on the corner of his wrist there was another little tattoo. The three triangular dots meant he was a Sureño. Inside there was a



Figure 1.2 Valentine's Day Envelope from Alejandro to Güera.

card with a poem, *Las flores son bellas pero frágiles, y así son las mujeres: bellas, frágiles, y necesitan alguien quien las cuide* (*Flowers are beautiful but they're fragile, and that is how women are: beautiful, fragile, and needing someone to take care of them*). This seemed pretty ironic to me since Alejandro was in jail and not in a great position to take care of anyone.

After showing me the envelope Güera wanted to know, “Do you like Norteños?” I hesitated and wondered who this might get back to, but she didn’t wait to hear my answer. I think she wanted to get things off her chest. “I really hate Norteños because they broke the windows of my father’s car. It was the only car he had. They wanted it and he wouldn’t give it to them, so instead of taking it they just ruined it. Ever since then, I’ve hated Norteños,” she said. And after a pause, “What would you do if your boyfriend was – into gangs, you know, what would you do?”

It was hard to imagine new-age, vegetarian Rob in any kind of gang, though he had been in an Ashram in India.

“Just imagine that he was in a gang, do you think he could change? Just hypothetically?”

“Ay, Güera. I don’t know. It’s important to be loyal, but you can’t get sucked into a *remolino* (*vortex*), you have to be your own person and watch out for yourself.”

“Do you think I can change Alejandro? Tanya says that if he really loved me he could change for me. He would stay out of gangs, totally leave the Sureños if I told him to.”

I wanted to tell her that I thought you can’t really change people but we got interrupted. Just then, Karina walked by and having heard

the last of our exchange, said no, forget it. No cambian (*They don't change*). Someone else who was overhearing said anyone could change if they really tried. Tanya walked by and rolled her brown eyes in condemnation.

According to Güera, when Tanya first came to Fog City she too was friendly with all the Sureños. How could she not be? When she arrived from Mexico Tanya shared the same beginning ESL classes with them; they were the first people who included her, who said hello to her every day, and practically the only people that she could understand at first because of their resolute Spanish use. The Sureño boys accepted her as a “border sister,” invited her to hang out by the parking lot behind the Target on Industrial Way, and played Oldies for her. Being in no position to refuse friendship, Tanya went along, listening to *Angel Baby* and other American songs from the 1960s that she thought were incredibly old-fashioned. But Tanya didn't really like the Sureños; she could tell by their accents and their mannerisms that they had been poor in Mexico, even if now her Mom had to work alongside their parents. Most of the Sureños were from the depopulated regions of the Mexican central-western states,³ whose melancholy names were now borne by mom-and-pop restaurants in their new California neighborhoods: *La Jalisciense*. *La Michoacana*. *La Oaxaqueña*.⁴

Lock-Down Piporras and Cosmopolitan Fresas

Tanya looked around for some other social options outside the ESL classes. She joined the *Ballet Folklórico*, the Mexican folkloric dance group where Ms Carla, a bilingual Mexican-American teacher, was more interested in nurturing a small group of what Robert Smith⁵ has perceptively called “lock-down girls.” As the most recent of immigrants from rural Mexico, Piporras were the girls that other Latinas in the school sometimes complimented, sometimes taunted as being “traditional Mexican girls.”

Tanya, a Fresa urbanite who had already been to raves with her cousins in Mexico, was a lot wilder than your average Piporra, and didn't get along with Ms Carla. Tanya found the Piporra group and its constant supervision too constraining, and when she finally met the other Fresas, she abruptly stopped speaking to all the Sureños in her class, and buried her nose in her books just to get out of there as quickly

as possible. Soon enough Tanya was promoted out of the beginning ESL class and that is when her Fresa career really took off.

Güera, on the other hand, was still friends with all the Piporras who had been her network before she started hanging around with Junior. At Sor Juana High School, it was the locked-down Piporras who were considered “at risk,” the target population of specialized school programs like Migrant Education,⁶ a federally-funded program that provided academic assistance to youth whose parents’ farm work resulted in long periods of school absences.

Piporras’ daily routine consisted of going straight from home to school, staying after school for their extracurricular activities and supervised studying, and coming right back home to do housework and watch over their siblings, usually while both parents worked. Vested with the role of keepers of tradition, they were often asked and sometimes just expected to participate in activities which reproduced versions of Mexican traditions or activities that were emblematic of some version of Mexican femininity with silent abnegation thrown in. Thus it was often Piporras (and their mothers) who volunteered or were volunteered to cook Mexican food for school events that involved Latinos, or volunteered to sew innumerable tiny sequins onto dance dresses for the group. Being held to these rigorous gender standards meant that the Piporras were scheduled, protected, and secluded. Piporras’ virginity seemed to be guaranteed by force of isolation. They were the ones who actually got scolded when they skipped school, while the Jocks and Fresas skipped constantly and no one ever said anything, though their absences got reflected in their grades. The scandal when a lock-down girl actually got pregnant! It was like nobody could figure out how it happened.

One subset of the Piporras usually ate together and retrieved their lunch from the cafeteria to consume it in one of the ESL classrooms, inhabiting a private, quasi-domestic sphere within the public school system. They were also to a certain degree excluded from the public sphere of school life, rendered almost invisible: their participation in extracurricular organized sports, for instance, was far lower than that of Latina girls in other groups. The principal of the school, who generously allowed me to do this study in the first place, said he would be happy if my study could help him understand just two questions: Why do Latina girls skip sports classes? And why won’t they change for gym class?

Immigrant and culturally distinct communities offer cases where the expectations of the school, of the parents, and of society may not only

fail to converge but in effect may create contradictory demands. Thus the Piporras' refusal to swim during their menstrual periods, while accurately aligned with parental authority and expectations, went deeply against the grain of what is commonly required of an American high-schooler, creating no end of conflict between parents and the school. The girls' negotiation and balancing of parental, cultural, and school expectations was especially complex, since contradictions sprang up in almost every arena – not only with respect to sports, but also with respect to how much and how late a girl may stay at school or fraternize with boys, and certainly with respect to how much girls should be taught about sex. And parents' standards were not the only buoys that Piporras tried to navigate. Linguistic expectations from teachers and classmates that dogged Piporras included the presumption of lesser English and greater Spanish proficiency. Because the Piporra designation subsumes ethnicity and class as well as gender, it allows us a window into the operation of these categories if we compare Piporras with other girls in the school.

It has been observed that immigrants' school success and eventual socioeconomic and class position in the new country are linked to pre-migration class position as well as their home countries' race-, class-, and gender-based oppression characteristics.⁷ The SJHS Fresas are an instantiation of this generalization. In contrast to the Piporras, the more "Westernized" Fresa groups of recent immigrant girls, coming from European families and higher socioeconomic status backgrounds in the big metropolises of Mexico, were regularly assumed by teachers to speak less Spanish than the Piporras (despite the fact that as bearers of the "standard" language they were often consulted by everyone for spelling and grammar). With more social freedoms and fewer responsibilities for the defense of traditional Mexican womanhood, the formerly-higher-SES (socioeconomic status) Fresas like Tanya were regularly promoted out of ESL classes. Subsequently, through exposure to mainstream curricula and the accompanying negative attitudes toward Spanish preservation, the middle-class Fresas also experienced greater language shift, little by little favoring English over Spanish and eventually fulfilling the assumption of greater English-speaking ability that others had of them from the beginning. Piporras, on the other hand, tended to maintain Spanish while they acquired English. Phenotypic Indianness and lower socioeconomic status functioned as the ratification of Piporras' authenticity as Mexican, and placed them under chronic stereotype threat, with interlocutors expecting their phenotype to correlate to Spanish

use. Fresas' backgrounds matched Euro-American and school expectations much more closely than those of Piporras: in everything from their more consistent early schooling, prior familiarity with computers and with standard language varieties, willingness to change into exercise clothes for PE, even up to their parents' greater involvement with the parent-teacher groups, expectations of school "functioning" were stacked on behalf of the Fresas.

Once the stigma of Piporra-hood, potential Indianness, and ESL status had been lifted, Tanya began to mill about with the other Fresas in a small courtyard, near the cafeteria and far away from the ESL offices that had nurtured her when she first arrived. Mixing in a wider circle, she met young people from other Latin American cities . . . Guadalajara; Puebla; Lima, Perú; Bogotá, Colombia; and even one girl from Spain and one from Brazil. This kind of international flavor gave the Fresa group a self-styled cosmopolitan flair. At SJHS, all these urbanite Fresas came from higher socioeconomic backgrounds in their home countries than the Piporras: whereas most of the Piporras' parents were farmers or agricultural laborers in Mexico, the Fresas' parents often had solidly middle-class, white-collar jobs (school principal, architect, systems analyst). Notwithstanding the fact that most recent immigrants essentially start at the bottom, Fresas drew on their elite backgrounds in their home countries to reproduce class privilege in a new environment. Jose and Domingo, the Fresa twins from Guadalajara, told me how much they hated being identified with the poor indigenous Mexicans, with Piporros, with Indians. Fresas had been middle class in Mexico! They protested that it wasn't fair! They resented Americans' assumptions that "just because we came from Mexico we don't know anything," like rock music or basketball or computers. Jose started dating a Japanese student, and Domingo a girl from India. Perhaps they could avoid the stigma of being Mexican if they could imagine themselves as international, transcending race and state boundaries altogether.

Fresas' attitudes toward Piporras/os reproduced urban/rural and white/indigenous/black divisions prevalent in postcolonial Latin America, and those attitudes in turn were reproduced within the Norteño/Sureño gangs which will be discussed in greater depth in later chapters. Interestingly, Fresas not only mocked Piporros for being from "small towns" in Mexico (see Tanya's quote above), but also for being from the Latino ethnic neighborhoods ("los barrios") in the US – even though the Fresas themselves lived in the same "barrios." The only difference

was that the upwardly mobile aspirations of the Fresas didn't allow them to see themselves as staying in the barrio.

When I interviewed Ernesto, a dark and thoughtful boy with a round face who came over from Mexico completely on his own and worked after school as a construction worker, he was outspoken:

“According to the guys from the capital, everybody else is an Indian. When somebody asks you where you're from, you need to think three times about what you're going to say.”

Junior reminded him, “Do you remember that kid, El Chanclas?”

“Eyyy. (Yes)”

“El Chanclas was from Michoacán. According to the Fresas from the capital, people from Michoacán, from Durango, from other states are Indians. Not according to me! So in order to answer they have to think about it. They'll say, oh, I am from DF [*Distrito Federal*, as Mexico City is known in Mexico]; they are embarrassed of who they are, and of how they talk. And then you ask, where in the DF are you from? They'll avoid the question and say, oh, just around, around there.”

Ernesto retorted, “I am not embarrassed. But we were poor. Over there, no tenía ni en qué caer muerto. (*I didn't even have anything to fall dead on.*)”

“Really?”

“I didn't. **Chanclas** didn't. So here we've changed, but not so much. To tell you the truth, I felt better in Mexico. I could speak my mind, I could say anything I wanted without having to think twice. And the school was better. Here they just make us do basic math that I already knew. Just because I don't know English.”

Although 20 percent of Sor Juana High School's 1,200-plus student population was Latina and Latino, only a very slight majority of that group was native English speaking, the rest being Spanish-dominant recent immigrants. Here the distinction between citizen and non-citizen was not quite useful. Some of the Spanish-dominant, culturally Mexican recent immigrants were in fact US citizens, having been born in the US and schooled in Mexico, or perhaps shuttled back and forth in circular migration loops. That was the case with Güera. She had been born in LA but her parents thought it was not a great place to grow up. Too many gangs. So they shipped Güera off by herself at the age of four to her grandma's in western rural Mexico where there was plenty of fresh air for the kids but few jobs for the adults. When Güera came back to California after grandma died, she was ten, hardly knew her parents, and was not exactly inclined to listen to them either. She missed

her grandma and everything about Mexico, and decided one day that she was totally, forever, exclusively Mexican. Graffiti on her notebook read proudly ¡*Puro México!*⁸ even though she had American papers.

On the other hand, some of the Latinos who were “mainstreamed” in the school would have nothing to do with Spanish speakers, and hid a Mexican passport like a dirty secret. Sometimes they didn’t even have Mexican or Salvadoran or Guatemalan documents to hide. As children they had been smuggled out so early, and had been without home-country documents for so long, that the only stable paperwork they had was in the name that was slapped on them by primary school administrators when they showed up to register the first day. This way Catalina became Kathy, Heriberto became Herb, Arnulfo became Arnie, and Xóchitl became Ann. Rita joked that she was no longer from Michoacán but from Michigan; that it was not too hard to get used to your new name since everyone except your parents used it. What was hard, she said, was remembering who you used to be.

Sor Juana High School

Nestled in the comfortable suburbs of the San Francisco Bay Area, in one of the counties with the largest Hispanic populations in the State of California (Santa Clara ranked eighth largest with 403,000 Hispanics, approximately 24 percent of the population of the county, according to the 2000 US Census), Sor Juana High School had changed drastically over thirty years of yearbook-recorded school history. Formerly, this high school and others in the surrounding area were almost exclusively Euro-American. In the mid-1990s Silicon Valley boasted high growth fueled by the tech manufacturing, blue chip finance, and recreation industries, where plentiful jobs attracted new immigrants from all over the world, but primarily from Latin America, East Asia, and Southeast Asia. These demographic changes contributed to an astonishingly diverse school environment, with students from African-American, Pacific Islander, Asian, Asian-American, and Latina/o backgrounds constituting a clear majority of the school population.

Sor Juana High School then was neither entirely suburban nor entirely urban. For the many well-to-do Euro-American youth attending Sor Juana, their experience of the school environment was decidedly suburban. They lived in the surrounding foothills – Foxbury

Hills – an upper and upper-middle-class neighborhood that ranks among the ten wealthiest communities in the United States. The students who lived in Foxbury Hills usually drove to school in their own or their parents’ cars, and on any morning the parking lot of SJHS reflected the parental income bracket – BMWs, Volvos, Lexuses and Range Rovers routinely clogged the small streets around the school. The adolescent progeny of the Bay Area’s wealthiest residents can attend public schools like Sor Juana High School because the tax base of the district is extremely strong, supporting an enhanced school environment that included sophisticated computer equipment, equestrian sports, and even sailing. A 1995 issue of the school newspaper, *The Sor Juana Times*, featured an article full of tips for students on stock investments, with portfolio management advice quoted directly from dot-com boomer siblings. The school was academically strong, achieving in 1994 the distinction of producing several top-scoring students on the nationwide Scholastic Aptitude Test, a feat rivaled by only a few other schools across the country.⁹

But not every student at SJHS drove or was chauffeured down from Foxbury Hills. Most of the Latino students, in fact, came on foot or by public transport from nearby Fog City. Their experience of the campus and of school life was completely different from that of students living in the affluent hills. Fog City is bisected by Industrial Way, one of the main urban highways in the area. Fog City students walked to and from school across the six-lane thoroughfare, navigating their way through the traffic and parking lots of the large discount stores, restaurants, service stations, and mini-malls that crowded the entire length of Industrial Way.

Unlike descriptions of Latino neighborhoods as located in “landscapes of neglect” in urban centers such as Los Angeles,¹⁰ Fog City failed to live up to media images of the “inner city” with boarded-up storefronts and dilapidated streets and buildings; it was rather a semi-urban community of workers for the service industries aimed at the suburbs: hotels, restaurants, fast-food chains, and janitorial services were the sources of employment for most Fog City students and parents, echoing Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo’s¹¹ portrayal of immigrants as “cleaning and caring in the shadows of affluence.” On a few occasions, fellow anthropologists visiting me from outside the area remarked, “*This* is a gang-infested neighborhood? But it looks so normal!”

Much as Fog City students experienced the environment surrounding the school differently from their Foxbury Hills peers, there was a

similar disparity within the grounds of the school. From the very beginning until the end of the school day, most Fog City students did not come into prolonged contact with Foxbury Hills students. It would be a mistake to say that the school was segregated; the majority of teachers and the school administration as a matter of policy continually tried to promote an atmosphere of cultural tolerance and racial harmony within the school. As far back as 1985, however, the *Sor Juana Times* reported growing racial tensions on the campus. It is easy to see how these tensions might have evolved and been perpetuated if one takes a close look at the campus and the activities taking place within it on a day-to-day basis.

Same School, Separate Lives

Although Fog City and Foxbury Hills students populated the same campus during the day and only went home to separate neighborhoods after school, they might as well have been in separate worlds for all the contact they had with one another. Because of the way that classes, meals, and even sports were structured, many Fog City students had only sporadic and fleeting contact with anyone from Foxbury Hills. A striking example of this dynamic was the lunchtime meal.

Lunch at Sor Juana High School was the largest stretch of unstructured time that students spent on campus, their only collective leisure time from the institutional obligations of school, giving them the freedom to enter and generate their own symbolic worlds of play and friendship. Thus it is during lunch that social divisions were most noticeable, as students were left to constitute social groups with little apparent structuring on the part of the school.¹² It was during this daily forty-minute interval that many of the events that were salient in the minds of the students took place: lunch was the hour that Erika and Angie, who had known each other since the first grade, chose to publicly declare the end of their friendship; it was the hour that indignant members of opposing gangs scheduled a fight (and campus security arrived too late, when the bell had rung and all were running to class); this was also the hour that word of the mid-morning murder on a clear spring day in 1995 of Tejano music singer Selena spread, and Latina students carefully placed their lunch food around a Selena CD to create a makeshift Catholic altar near the back wall of the cafeteria. After-lunch classes

always provided a continuing backdrop for lunchtime social events, as notes written during the lunch hour were delivered to their addressees by classmates.

At SJHS, the school unwittingly structured the use of space during lunch through the Free and Reduced Price Meals Program (FRPM). FRPM was a federal program available to students whose family income was at or below certain levels (\$27,380 per annum for a family of four during the 1994–5 school year). Students found to be eligible for FRPM could obtain free or reduced-price breakfasts and lunches on a daily basis from the school. For families struggling to make ends meet, FRPM was an important benefit. But because FRPM benefits were only available through the school cafeteria and not through the many franchise food stands that dotted the campus quad during lunch, a *de facto* division emerged: students who could afford to buy the better-tasting food from the franchise-owned stands did so, while students whose parents qualified for the FRPM program ate in the cafeteria. In this way, a state-verified class division was instituted and re-enacted every day at breakfast and lunch on the campus of SJHS. Fog City students, especially the impoverished recent-immigrant Asian and Latino students, as well as lower-income African-American students, ate in the cafeteria. They sat mostly in single-sex groups, facing each other at long white Formica tables with attached orange plastic stools. Each table in the cafeteria bore a common-knowledge reservation for the group that customarily occupied it. This is how different groups knew where to go, day after day, to find their friends or to drop off their backpacks before going through the crowded lunch line. An atmosphere of *relajo*¹³ reigned: a suspension of seriousness that purposefully subverted the still-sitting, strapped-down classroom ethos. Students wandered the narrow hallways created by the Formica tables, poking and nudging each other, sharing and forcing condiments on each other's food, and calling out over all heads in Spanish, Vietnamese, Tagalog, and English to interlocutors across the large, echoing room. Aside from *relajiento*¹⁴ students, the cafeteria was patrolled on foot and with walkie-talkies by the dreaded hall monitors, whose job it was to ensure that order prevailed in the food queues and that rowdy students were sent to the assistant principal. Occasionally the assistant principal herself marched into the cafeteria in an attempt to impose order, and commanded students to stand quietly, single file, issuing stern orders accompanied by vague threats: "By the time I count to THREE, you all *better* be in one single line. ONE . . . TWO . . ."

Outside the cafeteria, the mostly Euro-American (and some established African- and Asian-American) residents of Foxbury Hills milled about the inner quad. It couldn't really be said that many of them ate, since a good number of the girls, continually watchful of their bodies and fearful of weight gain, rarely ate, at least in public.¹⁵ The boys sat in dyads and triads on the steps of the fountain or on long aluminum benches and consumed food from the franchise stands, while most of the girls stood and socialized. Very few people brought lunch from home. Perhaps once a month, when there was some delicacy available only in the cafeteria, Foxbury Hills students would hurry through the lunch line and saunter back out to the quad with their treats.

It was in the central quad area that many of the school-sponsored lunchtime activities took place: small-scale rock concerts by one of Foxbury Hills' many homegrown student grunge bands, or pep rallies, or springtime fairs with booths selling cake and cheerleaders' kisses. Latina/o voluntary attendance at these school-wide events was low, except for activities that were geared specifically toward them. On the day that Banda music was featured, blaring *chun-ta-ta* from loudspeakers in the quad during lunch, an interesting reversal took place: Fog-City Latina/o students took over the quad with space-intensive Banda dancing, and Foxbury Hills students matter-of-factly filed into the cafeteria and sat at the long tables, waiting out the unsuccessful attempt by the administration to mix up the social groups. As far as most students were concerned, it amounted to little more than a temporary disequilibrium in the ecology of school space.

Each subgroup within the complex social system of the high school adopted a space that it considered its own. In the beginning of the school year, old groups tentatively reclaimed the previous years' spaces, and new groups simultaneously began to form and "hang out" in territories they might later call their own. The geographic boundaries that emerged on the campus of the school were powerful and consistent, demarcating socioeconomic, ethnic, and linguistic borders.¹⁶ These boundaries served as isoglosses that divided students in every detail, from the seemingly inconsequential such as clothing and hairstyles to distinctions that would certainly endure over the course of students' lives: courses taken, grade point averages, and public perceptions: the "goody-goody" Piporras could be found in the back room, the "troublemaker" Norteñas wearing red, swearing and joking in the public theater of the parking lot in front of the school.

Each of the different social groups in the high school carved out a space for itself in the landscape provided by these facilities. One crowd of mostly Euro-American, uniformly Foxbury Hills teens who might consider themselves “popular”¹⁷ could be found hanging out on the very front central space right in the middle of the south corridor. The punks and the smokers relaxed whenever possible on the periphery of the school, behind the gymnasium, sneaking cigarettes near the baseball diamond or by the open spaces on the playing fields. Sometimes they cut class on the lawn of the soccer field, lying and staring at the sky until the early afternoon when the soccer balls came out.

The different groups of Latinas/os in the school adopted certain different portions of the school campus as their “hangouts.” During the time of my fieldwork, there were six main areas of the school where different groups of Latina/o students met, socialized and carried out joint activities, simultaneously creating and reinforcing their communities. Each of these groups had a unique “personality” and an overall orientation toward the mainstream goings-on of the high school, toward other ethnic groups at the school, toward other groups of Latinas/os, toward authority and toward language. Language among this diverse group was also widely varied, with some young people speaking Standard California Euro-American English, many speaking various forms of Chicano English, and others eschewing English altogether in favor of Mexican Rural Spanish, Standard (Urban) Mexican Spanish, and various dialects of Central American Spanish.

Linguistic identity as indexed by the dialects of the schoolyard is one of the key components of the construction of social and academic relationships at Sor Juana High School. In order to understand the complex relationship among language, academic placement, and social group formation at Sor Juana High School, we will locate Latina/o students’ linguistic and educational situation within the larger picture of linguistic diversity at Sor Juana High School.

Latinas/os were cited by school sources (like the yearbook, the principal, and the *Sor Juana Times*) as one of the main component groups of the high school, comprising 20 percent of the high school population. This seemingly monolithic “Latina” group consisted of Chicanas, Mexicans, and recent immigrants from other Latin American countries, many of them Salvadorans. Within these groups, there were cross-cutting allegiances of varying strengths, as students divide themselves along national, ethnic, class, and Chicana/Mexican lines. In presenting the groups as described by students and observed by myself, I want to

stress, along the lines proposed by Edmund Leach,¹⁸ that the social categories I describe are not bounded sets, but rather parts of a single coherent system that is always fluid, always changing, precariously equilibrated, and constantly innovating on itself. Group boundaries were neither solid nor stable, and people moved in and out of groups with relative ease, depending on whether or not they spoke the group's language and shared the group's practices. In the case of the two groups we have just discussed, the Piporras and the Fresas, the language barrier was small (the Fresas spoke various urban dialects of Standard Latin American Spanish, the Piporras usually Rural Mexican Spanish), but the intra-cultural divide was large enough to prevent much interaction. On the other hand, once the acquisition of English had progressed far enough, Fresas usually moved into the Latina Jock group. This means that almost by definition, the Fresas consisted of recent-immigrant, (formerly) middle-class Spanish speakers who had not yet acquired enough English to move into one of the predominantly English-usage groups. The Latina Jocks then were essentially the assimilated, English-language version of the Fresas, and indeed the similarity of the group was borne out by the many cross-group friendship lines that existed, as well as by the fact that when there were big school assemblies the Latina Jocks and the Fresas sat together on the bleachers.

Jocks, Latinas, and Popularity

Although participation in school-sponsored sports was not a necessary condition for Jock-category membership,¹⁹ athletic activities usually went hand-in-hand with a constellation of traits that signaled the Jocks' overall cooperation with the school as an institution, and by extension, their cooperation with the larger society in which the institution is embedded. In Penny Eckert's study, which dealt with an ethnically homogenous Euro-American high school, school-related activities were considered by rebellious students (*Burnouts*, to use the term common among the adolescents in Eckert's book) to be in collusion with the larger world of parental authority. School in general, and the specific activities associated with it, were resented and resisted by Burnouts for their role *in loco parentis*. In Eckert's study, school authority and parental authority, though not exactly overlapping, were largely aligned, especially in regard to the Jocks. But what would happen in a case where the school and

the parents had different expectations and demands, such that in fulfilling one set of expectations a young person violated the norms of the other?

In this sense a Latina Jock girl (as well as a mainstream Euro-American Jock girl), who typically participated in sports, attended school-sponsored functions late at night, and devoted her weekends to extracurricular school-related affairs (i.e., the yearbook club) aligning her with mainstream Euro-American values, already incurred the disapproval of recent-immigrant parents of Piporras, who inculcated and sometimes just imposed more traditional gendered expectations. In this sense it could be said that Latina Jock girls, athletic, “popular,” and acceptable to teachers, already stood on the other side of a wall, having acquired or shifted into cultural patterns that ran counter to a large part of what a “good girl” in the home culture might be. And despite the fact that a Latina Jock’s parents may themselves have been second-, third-, or fourth-generation Americans aligned with mainstream Euro-American values, the large population of recent immigrants with a world-view rooted in rural Latin America still held Jock girls in some degree of contempt for having assimilated. Faced with little validation from their ethnic/cultural peers, it was no surprise that Latina Jocks turned to institutional sources of approval.

One essential aspect of a Latina Jock’s identity was some degree of school spirit, be it in the form of running for elected office within the school government, of practicing organized sports, or taking part in clubs or activities such as cheerleading. Because by and large school-oriented activities were populated and organized by Euro-American Jocks, this meant that the greater part of the social networks of a Latina Jock consisted of Euro-Americans. Girls who identified themselves as Latina Jocks in this study claimed to know no Spanish (though some understood it passively), were usually Standard Euro-American English speakers, and knew some Latina girls from their neighborhood contexts, but were reluctant to name other Latinas as their friends.

The ideologically driven Latina gang girls called the Jocks “coconuts” (a common insult referring to being brown on the outside and white on the inside), and accused Jocks to their faces of being “whitewashed”, or of “selling out” to the mainstream. These criticisms were noticed but ignored by the Jocks, whose activity in essentially separate social systems gave them little reason to care about these social evaluations.

A popular Latina Jock cheerleader named Jill did not particularly approve of or want to be accepted by the other groups of Latinas:

JILL: I see a lot of Latina girls, they just hang out with their own little group in a certain spot. I think it looks totally stupid 'cause they're like trying to accomplish something but they're not, you know? Like they're trying to – “look at me, you know . . . I'm like above all of you guys.” I don't know, that's the way I see it. And I think it's just stupid. I don't think I'd like to [hang around with them] anyways . . . just because . . . I don't know. Different ideas I guess.

In this excerpt Jill criticized the ethnically uniform groups of Latinas for “hang[ing] out in their own little group,” and acknowledged her own discomfort at being scrutinized under their disapproving eye. Jill's own social sphere mostly centered around the cheerleading squad, the football team, and “crazy Foxbury Hills parties,” the parents-gone-out-of-town blowouts thrown by wealthy kids and weekly reviewed and rated in a *Sor Juana Times* column. Although Jill's parents were of limited means (her mother earned money by taking care of other people's children in her home in a modest neighborhood in Fog City), this did not deter Jill from aspiring to move out of her neighborhood and to New York City with her wealthy Foxbury Hills girlfriends when she graduated from high school. And she did.

When I asked her about the extent of her friendship networks with other Latinas, Jill said that although she used to talk to some of the Latinas in her elementary school, they “just grew apart.” We will see more of what Jill means in chapter 8, when we examine the speech patterns of a cross-section of English-speaking Latina girls and find that, on the whole, Latina Jocks differ the most in speech patterns from other Latina girls, to the extent that they can hardly be considered part of the same continuum of variation.

Ethnic Diversity, Linguistic Diversity, and Educational Possibility

Sor Juana High School was a microcosm of the demographic situation that increasingly faces schools across the country,²⁰ where rising immigrant populations have created diversity that challenges teachers, exceeds school capacities, and provides students with opportunities for learning about difference. Sor Juana High School, with a total student

body of 1,162 students, was 32 percent European-American, 22 percent Asian/Asian-American, 20 percent Latina/o, 14 percent African-American, 7 percent Pacific Islander, and 5 percent Other. It boasted student populations numerous enough to sustain cultural activities such as Mexican, Filipino, and Vietnamese classical dance troupes, and African-American Steppers.

The diversity of the student body, though usually depicted idealistically as a sort of mini-United Nations, also brought its share of challenges, especially when it came to instruction for students who arrived speaking languages other than English. In a few cases, immigrant students were absorbed into the educational system if their country of origin had English as its sole official language. But for other immigrant students the school undertook a complex procedure to classify them and assess their linguistic needs.

The 1995 California Education Code (Article 313) required schools to determine the language(s) spoken at home by each student. Upon each student's arrival, parents were sent the Home Language Survey, an instrument designed by the State of California Department of Education to determine the home language background of the student. The survey consisted of the following questions:

- 1 Which language did your son or daughter learn when he or she first began to talk?
- 2 What language does your son or daughter most frequently use at home?
- 3 What language do you use most frequently to speak to your son or daughter?
- 4 Name the language most often spoken by adults at home.²¹

Based upon parental answers to these questions, students were categorized and assigned a code corresponding to the home language. If all of the answers reflected an English-only household, the student was assigned a code of "English," but if *any* of the answers reflected the use of languages other than English, the student was assigned a code that identified the language used in the home. Thus, minimal use of another language by members of the household but not necessarily by the student could serve to classify a student as having a non-English language background.

According to this criterion, only 60 percent of Sor Juana students had English as their sole home language. These were considered to be

the “mainstream” students, those who were following the high school core curriculum and had the opportunity to take college preparatory courses without other prerequisites. The “mainstream” student population included most Euro-American students, most African-American students, and certain Asian-American students whose families had been in the US long enough to have shifted home language away from the original heritage languages. The remaining 40 percent (467/1,162) of Sor Juana students had a language other than English as their home language.

Each student who was determined according to the above criteria to speak a language other than English in the home was assigned to one of two categories: Limited English Proficient (LEP) or Fluent English Proficient (FEP). The first category, with its unfortunate acronym of “LEP” (which led some kids to call each other “lep’rs”), has since been renamed “English learner” in more recent versions of the legal code, but the classificatory and remedial spirit remains the same. I will use LEP here for historical accuracy and consistency with the documents I examined.

Of the students who were found to have a language other than English as their home language, 61 percent (283/467) were classified as Limited English Proficient, while 40 percent were judged to be Fluent English Proficient. In effect, this means that fully one-quarter of the entire student body (24 percent (283/1,162)) was considered to have Limited English Proficiency. But how did the school determine which students were Limited English Proficient and which were Fluent English Proficient?

When I interviewed the program director of the school’s English as a Second Language (ESL) program, she stated that in order to be reclassified as Fluent English Proficient, a student “has to score above the 36th percentile on a standardized reading test, pass a [state-administered] competency exam, have passing grades, and be *functioning* (my emphasis) in school.” If any of these four criteria were not met, the student could not be reclassified as Fluent English Proficient.

The lockstep use of standardized testing, a legacy of the school reform movement of the 1980s, was especially treacherous for immigrant and minority children who were evaluated according to Standard English proficiency.²² Inflexible grade placement, where grade promotion (and especially level promotion in the case of ESL students) was tied to designated cut-off scores on standardized achievement tests, could be especially discouraging for students who were orally fluent but whose written proficiency was not at the level required by the exams.

In addition to facing the hurdles of standardized testing and retention, LEP proficient students additionally had to prove that they were “functioning.” Even after having achieved FEP status, a student was still under observation by the school. A failed class (even a non-academic class like Woodshop, or Physical Education) or complaints from a teacher that a student was not functioning (“disruptive in class,” as noted on report cards) could be enough to prevent a student from achieving FEP status. Thus, one important criterion to advance to the next level of “proficiency” was in some cases nonlinguistic. In the course of fieldwork, I encountered many *orally* fluent Chicano English speakers who continue to be classified as LEP because of “disruptive” behavior or low test scores.

Even by the school’s own measuring standards there were many students who achieved a high degree of oral language fluency who nevertheless could not be reclassified as FEP. One additional exam that the school administered to LEP students was an individual Oral Proficiency Examination. The Oral Proficiency Examination was scored on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest proficiency). According to this scale, 51 percent (92/181) of Latina/o Limited English Proficient students obtained the highest possible score on the oral fluency test. This examination, however, did not play a part in determining a student’s Limited/Fluent status, but was used in assessing whether the student was eligible to be “mainstreamed” in some classes that were deemed to require mostly oral/listening skills as opposed to literacy (like Arts and Crafts, or Health).

So here a paradox emerges: even though fully half of the Latina/o LEP students had the highest possible scores in oral proficiency examinations, it was still the case that the great majority of these students were not succeeding in school, had high dropout rates, and were placed in low-level classes because of low grades, overall test scores, or behavioral issues.

The technical criteria by which an institution such as a school system assessed fluency would not be of such importance if LEP and FEP status were mere formalities, or served only internal recordkeeping functions. In fact, these acronyms played a large role in determining and predicting a student’s educational opportunities. When classified as LEP, a student could not follow the school’s regular course program for college preparation, but instead had to continue taking English as a Second Language courses. Although ESL courses counted toward fulfilling a student’s high school graduation requirements, only the most advanced

ESL courses counted toward fulfilling the basic four-year college entrance requirements. College preparatory curricula to enter higher education in the University of California (UC) system or the California State University (CSU) system were standardized across the state, and a student's initial placement within the high school ESL system could easily determine whether or not they would be able to fulfill UC/CSU requirements by the time they were graduating seniors.

The Sor Juana High School 1993–4 course guide listed a total of twenty ESL courses spread over a number of areas, including ESL History, ESL Mathematics, ESL sciences, and even ESL typing. But only four of the twenty ESL courses (Advanced English, U.S. History, Civics, and Algebra I) counted toward UC/CSU requirements. This meant that for the vast majority of ESL students, the only way to have the opportunity of attending a UC or a CSU was to be placed in Advanced ESL as incoming freshmen (ninth-graders), so that they might be able to complete the four-year English course requirement for college entrance.

For the 1993–4 school year, the vast majority of incoming ESL students at SJHS were recommended by middle school officials for placement in beginning or intermediate sections of ESL. In fact, only five of thirty entering Latina/o LEP freshmen were placed in Advanced ESL that year.

The systematic outcome of this structured-level program was that the vast majority of orally fluent Latino students never moved out of the LEP designation, and as a result were ineligible to attend four-year institutions. Even when they did graduate from high school and attended a community college, the remedial ESL courses that they needed to take in order to qualify for enrollment in regular college classes would set them back at least one full year. The opportunity cost of that time was simply too high for poor families who relied on their children for increasing financial contributions to the household.²³

During the time of my fieldwork, Latina/o students repeatedly came up against two practical effects that stemmed directly from the system of classification described above: erroneous placement and stereotyping. Armando had immigrated from Mexico when he was five years old. At fifteen, he was a fluent Chicano English speaker and had been promoted through ten grade levels without ever being reclassified from limited to Fluent English Proficient. "He is just too rowdy," said the teachers. "I am bored in class," said Armando. "*What is this? This is a dog. This is a cat.* Give me a break! I'd rather get kicked out of class." What seemed especially ironic about Armando's case is that he did not

speak Spanish at home with his family, but displayed a common pattern reflective of ongoing language shift: his parents spoke in Spanish to him and his siblings, and they all answered exclusively in English.

Alexandra was another student whose mother had fought a bitter battle with teachers as the girl was about to enter high school. Although she was a stellar student in middle school, her test scores were too low to have her reclassified as FEP. After two months of fighting and showing teachers Alexandra's personal diary in English (much to her dismay), the family finally gave up and secretly enrolled Alexandra in the public high school in the next district. They succeeded in getting her an FEP designation in her new school, and she went on to follow a regular college prep curriculum.

A final example of institutional barriers to student success comes in the form of a student article in the *Sor Juana Times*, the high school weekly newspaper. In the spring of 1994, Laurie Bexley, a half-Mexican, half-Euro-American student wrote an article entitled "Even Unintentional Racism Hurts."²⁴ In this article, Laurie chronicles the experiences of her mother at SJHS teacher-parent conferences. She writes:

When I first came to Sor Juana, I wasn't doing well in Biology, and when my mom went to [teacher-parent conference] night, she talked to my teacher about it. My mother has a very thick accent, and it is clear to almost everyone that she comes from Latin America. When she asked my teacher what was wrong, he replied by telling her that students at Sor Juana come from very different schools, and that my junior high probably didn't prepare me as well as others for this course.

When my mom went on to say that I went to [a prestigious school in Foxbury Hills] and had a 4.0 in the past, he was stupefied.

"Oh, oh, oh. Laurie is your daughter, I'm so sorry I thought you were someone else's mother," my teacher replied.

It was pitiful. My teacher had made an obviously racist assumption that because my mother was Hispanic I went to an inferior junior high, and that was the reason for my problems in Biology.

It doesn't stop there, though. I've seen it time and time again, and it all gets swept under the rug by the administration who likes to focus their efforts on the prestigious, rich, white kids at Sor Juana.

All of the above student experiences reflected to some degree the way that academics were structured for Latinas/os at SJHS. Laurie Bexley's piece specifically pointed to the common stereotypes conflating neighborhood residence, ethnicity and school performance.

Interpreting Fluency: Researcher Effects and Ethnographic Uncertainty

As I mentioned above, Güera was a very fluent English speaker who had moved back and forth between Mexico and the US. She was the official translator for the recently arrived Spanish monolinguals in her beginning ESL II class. Her class schedule included Bilingual World Studies with Junior; mandatory mainstream Health classes; a Special-Education math course that had only African-American and Latino students in it; and Cosmetology as her elective. Because she spent her very early childhood in the US, and because some of her relatives spoke English, Güera's phonology was near-native. What struck me about her, and the reason I became interested in following her progress, was that she had poor reading and writing skills despite her excellent speaking skills and listening comprehension. At the time of the interview, Güera was in danger of failing Beginning ESL II.

NORMA: Aha. Y este.. a tí que te gusta más hablar, inglés o español?
Yeah. So . . . what do you prefer to speak, Spanish or English?

GÜERA: Español.
Spanish.

NORMA: Español, porqué?
Spanish, why?

GÜERA: No sé. Me gusta más español.
I don't know. I like Spanish better.

NORMA: Lo que se me hace interesante . . . es que, pues tú teniendo ya tanto tiempo aquí, acostumbrada al idioma de acá, ¿no? que te juntas mucho con Mexicanos, y que hablas mucho español.
What I think is interesting is that you, having been so long here, and being used to the language here, you hang out mostly with Mexicans, and speak a lot of Spanish . . .

GÜERA: Yo pienso que aunque hablara mucho inglés yo, hablaría siempre español . . . algunos dicen, no, que nomás 'ta aprendiendo inglés, y ya no, habla español, porque de muchas, [toca la mesa] aquí, nomás aprenden el inglés y ya no quieren hablar español, y eso, a mi me cae gordo!
I think that even if I spoke a lot of English, I would only speak Spanish. There are a lot [of girls] here, [taps the table], that as soon as they learn English, they don't want to speak Spanish anymore, and that, I really hate!

NORMA: Mhmm.

Mhmm.

GÜERA: Y tu les hablas español y ellas te.. te contestan en inglés, eso me cae gordo a mí.

And you speak in Spanish to them, and they . . . answer you in English, I really hate that.

In this excerpt exploring Güera's language attitudes, she declares a preference for Spanish. I remark to her that her insistence on Spanish is remarkable in this context, since she speaks English so well and is very much accustomed to life in the United States. My question is implicitly one of membership as well. Since her English was so good, if she wanted to socialize with other speakers as well, why wouldn't she? Certainly she had everything that could enable her to join other groups if she wished. Her answer was very revealing. She *denies* being able to speak a lot of English, and states that *even if she did*, she would still choose to speak Spanish. I have previously analyzed the foregoing interview excerpt as follows:

This crucial sentence shows not only her rhetorical position with respect to the language question, but also her self-perception which, despite her near-native phonology, does not allow her to construct herself as an English speaker. Güera looks down on people who refuse to speak Spanish after having learned English (an indirect reference to Norteñas), implying that they shun much more than a linguistic code by opting for English. She even disapproves of inter-speaker codeswitching, one of the linguistic devices most often used by Norteñas.²⁵

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Looking back at this interview, I realize that there is a presupposition in my question that Güera might be reacting to as well: it sounds as though I am implying that it is somehow odd for a fluent English speaker to hang around only with Mexicans and to speak exclusively in Spanish.

My original interpretation stressed linguistic disidentification²⁶ in an effort to account for the paradox of Güera's native-like fluency and her poor reading and writing grades. What if in addition to these factors there was also an added element of opposition to notions introduced by the ethnographer? It is possible that her note of caution against language loss and identity denial was not only rhetorical, but also meant specifically for me, and that it is only now, with several years' hindsight, that I am able to interpret her admonition. As I started doing

the interviews, I struggled with self-presentation, with the meaning that everything from my appearance to the life choices I'd made might have for students contemplating their own choices.

Güera knew I spoke both languages, and that I was dating Rob – un gringo güero (*a Euro-American*) – from California. After we'd gotten to know each other well, and were on joking/teasing terms with each other, she and some of her other Sureña girlfriends didn't bat an eye as they informed me: "I'd much rather be with a Mexican than with an American." They had met Rob, thought he was nice (it was especially good that he spoke Spanish), but it was also clear that they didn't really approve. All along the girls tried (unsuccessfully) to set me up with eligible older Mexican guys, just as they tried to mold me by teaching me about makeup, about cooking, about ways to dress and dance. Special allowances were made for me because I hadn't in fact grown up either in Mexico or in the US, so the girls suspended judgment and tried to inculcate in me what they thought I'd missed.

Güera teased me all the time, about not being so good at Banda-dancing, about my skirts (Dickies pants or at least jeans would be better), about the American boyfriend. In hindsight, I now see that she might have been positioning herself relative to me and my choices in answering my interview questions. This is of course what people do in the course of everyday conversation. Why should linguistic anthropologists think that we are merely tape decks, faithfully recording statements about language and then neutrally reproducing and analyzing the ideological statements of people we have interviewed? This is not just another instance of figuring out that the presence of the researcher crucially affects the nature of the data gathered, and figuring out ways to lessen that effect, as William Labov²⁷ advocated thirty-five years ago in naming the observer's paradox (discussed in greater detail in chapter 7). This awareness of researcher positionality from within the sociolinguistic literature ought to have made us linguists more open to the interpretive turn within anthropology, and yet in both sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology there is truly a dearth of self-reflexive work. There are of course some exceptions,²⁸ but by and large linguistic anthropology operates unaffected by questions of reflexivity and of the nature of our data.

Over the course of two years of participant observation and friendship with Güera, I *was* able to observe repetition of a pattern in many different interactions (with teachers, with other students, and with her relatives) bolstering my perception that Güera strategically constructed

herself as a non-speaker of English. It is because of this repeated confirmation of the initial observation that I continue to believe that Güera is an example of the effect that language ideologies can have on learning motivation and consequently on educational outcomes. I believe that her socially precipitated disidentification with English negatively affected her motivation to refine her reading and writing skills in English at an important post-primary learning period, and since the school's support for Spanish language instruction was extremely limited (from the school's perspective, the main goal for all non-native speakers was to learn English as quickly as possible), this disidentification might have affected her literacy skills in Spanish as well.

With the hindsight of ten years, I can also now begin to address how and why my presence affected some youth more than others, and how my status as a barely older youth at the time, neither from the US nor from Mexico, shaped some of my interviews. Within the interviewees' words were lessons meant for me.

Notes

- 1 Horrox (1994)
- 2 Chiquita Brands (2006)
- 3 See Bustamante (1994) for detailed statistical breakdowns of sending-state data collected from migrants in crossing.
- 4 The Mexican states of Jalisco, Michoacán, and Oaxaca provide the root for these nostalgic names.
- 5 Smith (2005)
- 6 For Migrant Education please see the US Department of Education website: <http://www.ed.gov/programs/mep/index/html>
- 7 Gibson (1988), Gibson (1997), Perlmann (1988)
- 8 Puro Mexico means "Pure Mexican" or "100% Mexican."
- 9 School principal, p.c.
- 10 Davis (1990), Valle and Torres (2000), Hyams (2003)
- 11 Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001)
- 12 Gibson (1988), Eckert (1989), Orenstein (1994), Taylor (2006)
- 13 Marica Farr defines *relajo* as "joking talk that, like fiesta or carnival, turns the social order 'upside down' and thus provides a space for social critique" (Farr 2003: 160).
- 14 *Relajiento* is a person who jokes around, see *Relajo* note above.
- 15 See also Orenstein (1994), Taylor (2006).
- 16 Willis (1977), Eckert (1989), Foley (1990), Eckert (2000)
- 17 The equivalent of the "Jocks" in Eckert (1989) and Eckert (2000).

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- 18 Leach (1954)
- 19 As Eckert (1989) points out.
- 20 Portes and Rumbaut (1996), Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2002)
- 21 California Department of Education (1995)
- 22 Smitherman-Donaldson (1986), Valdés (1994), Ogbu (1999)
- 23 Matute-Bianchi (1986), National Coalition of Advocates for Students (1988: 28), Gibson and Ogbu (1991), Matute-Bianchi (1991)
- 24 Bexley (1994)
- 25 Mendoza-Denton (1999)
- 26 For other accounts of linguistic disidentification and resistance in literacy and learning see Gilmore (1985) and Valdés (2001).
- 27 Labov (1972b)
- 28 Briggs (1986), Rickford and McNair-Knox (1994), Cukor-Avila and Bailey (2001), Gaudio (2001), Jacobs-Huey (2006), Modan (2006), Wertheim (2006), Modan and Mendoza-Denton (forthcoming)

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