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The Power of Print: The Role of Literacy in Preserving Native Cultures

by H. RUSSELL BERNARD

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In this paper I will discuss the history of the Otomí Bilingual Ethnography Project, and the development of what is known as a "completely general word processor." By now, of course, everyone knows about word processors. The problem is that word processing software and hardware have been geared to the needs of people who write languages with literate traditions, and in particular those languages that use one or another variant of the Roman alphabet (English, French, Norwegian) or the Japanese syllabary. (I will not discuss word processing in Chinese because both the hardware and the software requirements are so radically different from those of languages which are written with alphabets or syllabaries.) People who speak so-called "exotic" languages (languages without a literary tradition, or languages like Hindi and Thai that do not use a variant of the Roman alphabet) do not yet have access to computer technology in general and to word processing in particular. In my view, access to this technology may be among the most important variables in the fostering of cultural pluralism, but more on that later.

The Otomí Ethnography Project began in 1972, when Jesús Salinas Pedraza, my colleague and friend, came to San Diego to learn to write Otomí, his native language. Otomí is spoken by a third of a million people in central Mexico. There are six dialects, the largest being Mezquital Otomí with approximately 90,000 speakers. The Mezquital Valley is mostly desert, ranging from 1,700 m to 2,700 m above sea level and occupying 40% of the state of Hidalgo. A small part of the Mezquital is known as the "zona de riego," or the "irrigated zone." Most of the Otomí people live in the "zona arida," or "desert zone."

Traditionally, the Otomí lived on non-nucleated, highly dispersed settlements and extracted all their needs from the desert. Even today, many Otomí live in sparsely settled areas throughout the Mezquital. They still rely heavily on the maguey (*agave*) plant for some of their sustenance (*pulque*), for fiber (*ixtle*) to make carrying cloths, and for thatching material for houses. During the past 30 years, however, there have been many government-sponsored programs aimed at reducing poverty among the Otomí, and at increasing the level of health care and education. The principal agency responsible for development in the Mezquital is the Patrimonio Indígena del Valle del Mezquital. From its headquarters in Ixmiquilpan, on the Mexico City-Laredo highway, 160 km from the capital, the Patrimonio has transformed the Valley—building roads, clinics and schools; digging irrigation canals; and running electricity and phone service to remote parts of the area.

Life has changed for many of the Otomí people, and surely for the better. There is nothing at all to be said for hunger, poverty, disease and infant mortality. However, along with positive changes in the material conditions of life have come changes in custom—changes that many adult Otomí find regrettable. The most obvious behavioral change has been the replacement of Otomí by Spanish as the everyday language among children and young adults. When I first went to work in the Mezquital in 1962, I estimated that 40% of the women over 30 years of age were monolingual Otomí speakers. Today, I would estimate no more than 10%.

The increase in the use of Spanish, like the increase in access to education and medical care, has been to the good. There is no advantage to being excluded from the national economy simply because one cannot speak the national language. On the other hand, from the perspective of those interested in the fostering of cultural pluralism, the phasing out of Otomí (and the other 55 Native languages in Mexico) is not a hopeful sign. Fortunately, there is a major effort underway by the government to reverse this trend—a program in which Jesús Salinas participates, and in which our work has played a small part (more on that later, too).

Ironically, the replacement of Native languages by Spanish has occurred despite (some would argue because of) another government program. The famous “*Promotores*” program was designed to teach Native children Spanish literacy by using the local language as the medium of instruction. Officially, at least, the program was also supposed to foster literacy in Native Mexican languages. The idea was simple and appealing: since many Native children used to come to school speaking only Otomí or Tzotzil, or Zapotec, or Nahuatl, or some other language, why not teach them to read and write their own language first? That way, it was reasoned, the children would be more motivated to learn to read and write in the first place. In the meantime, they would also be learning to speak Spanish, and they could easily transfer their literacy skills to the national language as they became more competent in it. It was a good idea then, and it is a good idea now, both from a pedagogical perspective and from a cultural pluralist perspective. Anthropologists in Mexico and elsewhere hailed the “*Promotores*” program as an enlightened move that would help to preserve linguistic and cultural diversity while providing people with economically useful language skills. About eight million people in Mexico speak one or more of 56 officially recognized Native languages, so the program was by no means insignificant.

As everyone familiar with Mexican bilingual education knows, the “*Promotores*” program was very successful in “promoting” Spanish. And no one would deny that the competent use of Spanish is vital for the economic development of Native peoples in Mexico. Unfortunately, the program was a success at the expense of the Native languages. It is impossible to obtain exact figures, but there is general agreement that school children in Mexico are not using the languages of their homes as much as did their parents, and they are certainly not learning to read and write those languages.

Jesús Salinas was among those Otomí who lamented the potential demise of their language. Jesús is a trained, professional educator, a member of the federal teacher corps of Mexico. The *promotores* were initially recruited directly from among those who graduated the sixth grade. There was a

shortage of teachers, and the *promotores* were sent to the rural areas to teach basic literacy.

The basic problem was that there were neither effective bilingual educational materials nor a developed curriculum for integrating Native and Spanish literacy. The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) had a major complex right in Ixmiquilpan and it produced six grades’ worth of instructional material for reading and writing Otomí. But the SIL materials piled up in warehouses around the Mezquital and went unused.

I have written elsewhere about the failure of the SIL’s efforts to produce a single literate Otomí (see Bernard 1978). The *promotores* were not trained in bilingual education. Furthermore, there was nothing to read in Otomí except the Bible (which the SIL translated), so why should anyone bother in the first place? Many Otomí educators (and others) rejected the orthography that had been developed by the SIL because the Institute was engaged in Protestant missionary work. And, most importantly, it seemed pretty clear to most observers that government policy was to promote Spanish and to de-emphasize Native languages anyway. (The history and politics of bilingual education and language planning in Mexico have been treated extensively elsewhere: Heath 1972; Arana de Swadesh 1979; Caso 1954; de la Fuente 1964; Nahmad 1982; Villa Rojas 1971; Aguirre Beltrán 1973; Horcasitas and Pozas 1981; Scanlon and Lezama Morfin 1982.)

Jesús and I discussed a number of possibilities during the summer of 1971: Perhaps if there were an orthography that Otomí people could call their own? Perhaps if it were simple enough and could be typed on any standard keyboard without the need for special characters? Perhaps if there were something else besides the Bible to read?

Jesús Salinas and I met in the summer of 1962; I was collecting data for my Masters thesis in anthropological linguistics. Jesús, then in high school, agreed to work with me and to teach me as much Otomí as he could during those three months. He was 19 and I was 22. When I left the Mezquital in September 1962, Jesús and I did not see each other for five years. I returned in 1967 with the first group of graduate students in the Ixmiquilpan Field School in Ethnography and Linguistics. The field school ran for five years (through 1971) under support from the National Science Foundation. Over 50 anthropologists took their first field training in the Ixmiquilpan school. Among other things, they learned to hear the sounds of and to transcribe Otomí so that they might better record cultural data of all kinds. It was Jesús Salinas who provided those students with patient instruction in hearing Otomí properly. By 1967 Jesús had become a school teacher, and had taken up his first rural school post in the community of Dextho, about 6 km from Ixmiquilpan.

As summer after summer went by, Jesús and I began to develop some ideas. His role as linguistic informant further promoted his interest in Otomí literacy. He was keenly aware of the erosion in the use of Otomí; he saw clearly the role of the *promotores* in that erosion; and as a school teacher he knew the inadequacies of the SIL program and why the bilingual education materials from the Institute were not being used. Perhaps if he became literate in Otomí he might use his position as a teacher to encourage some children to do so as well?

At the time, I was interested in writing an ethnography of the Otomí. But since Jesús wanted to write about his own people, in his own language, it became immediately obvious that *he* should write the ethnography. I could be *his* informant: I could teach him to write in Otomí; I could coach him in the writing of an ethnography; I could translate the ethnography into English, enter the work on a computer, produce camera-ready copy and submit it for joint publication in Otomí and English.

As it turned out, the various roles that I envisioned for myself were well-conceived except for one: I had very little to teach Jesús about ethnography. I would like to be able to say that the anthropologist of this team has laid academic hands on Jesús' work and that the result is much better for it. But that's not how it happened. The content of the ethnography we are publishing is written by Jesús Salinas.

I felt then, and I feel now, that the ethnography we are producing is of fundamental interest. It is, of course, the subjective ethnographic observations of one member of the Otomí culture. But then *all* ethnographies are subjective and selective. Surely there could be nothing more to learn from my subjective ethnography than from Jesús Salinas'.

We were a long way in 1971, though, from actually writing an ethnography. It is one thing to be able to sound out a few words, or to write one's name; it is quite another to sit down, take pen to paper, and produce a free flow of ideas in writing. We began by producing a book of folk tales and jokes. The American Philosophical Society gave us a small grant and Jesús came to San Diego in July 1972. Jesús' father is a superb storyteller and Jesús followed in his father's footsteps. He recited several hours' worth of parables, folk stories and jokes into a tape recorder, and we began listening to the sounds of Otomí together. It did not take long before all the phonetic symbols that I was using made sense and we were able to transcribe the tape together.

Within three weeks, Jesús was transcribing the tapes on his own, and I was correcting them. Within four weeks, Jesús was on his own, and for the last two weeks of that summer session we did nothing but work through the transcriptions so that I could translate them into English.

We developed a system where Jesús would translate the Otomí phrase by phrase into Spanish; then we would work together, elbow to elbow, until, using both the Otomí and the Spanish, I understood the text completely. We worked this way until 1983, when Jesús began using an Apple computer and an Otomí word processor that I had devised with one of my students, Michael Evans (see Bernard and Evans 1983). Now Jesús types the Otomí ethnography directly into the computer and produces a free-flowing Spanish translation, which he also types directly into the computer. But this is getting ahead of the story.

By the time Jesús left San Diego in the fall of 1972, we were planning the ethnography. First we would publish the book of folk tales and jokes, and then I would apply for funding for Jesús to write the ethnography. Given the work we had accomplished in the six weeks in San Diego, I reckoned that it would take about four months for Jesús to write an ethnography of about eight chapters, and do the phrase-by-phrase literal translation into Spanish. I thought that it would take me about a year to do a polished translation.

Everything takes longer than you think, and nothing is as

simple as it seems. I've seen those "laws" on countless posters and desk plaques, and I should have known better. It took a year to translate the jokes and folk stories, and almost another year to enter all the material into a word processor on a mainframe computer. It took another year to find a way to publish that first effort. At the time, Eric Hamp was editing the Native American Texts Series (NATS) of the International Journal of American Linguistics. The purpose of the Series was to publish large amounts of primary text material for linguistic analysis. The idea was quite visionary, and the volumes that were produced (University of Chicago Press) are a trove of information for linguists, folklorists, and members of Native American Groups. But, alas, economics prevailed and the Series ceased hard copy production after a few years (it is still available, on demand, in either hard copy or microform).

NATS required that authors submit camera-ready copy. The University of Chicago Press was taking a financial risk to begin with, and the added cost of setting type (a lot of strange type, at that) would have been prohibitive. I talked with colleagues who were preparing camera-ready copy for the Series; it was tough going on a typewriter, even when special IBM typewriter elements were available for the particular language involved. But Jesús and I had formed an orthography that could be typed on any standard Spanish keyboard and this made it relatively simple to use word processing. By today's standards, the output I produced in 1974 was crude—but it was effective, and our first book appeared in NATS in 1975 (Bernard and Salinas 1976). The same year, I applied for funding to write the ethnography.

The National Endowment for the Humanities funded the proposal and in the fall of 1976 Jesús came to Morgantown, West Virginia, for the first of two, two-month writing stints. We discussed how he might start. I suggested naively that he start with something "relatively simple," like the "setting." After all, this was the first time that Jesús was writing directly from head-to-paper, and I thought that the "setting" (rather than, say, politics, economics, or family life) would be less complex and easier to do for a start. I found out pretty quickly just how wrong I was.

Jesús asked me to explain what I meant by the "setting." I told him that it consisted of a discussion of the physical characteristics of the region in which he lived—the geography, the fauna, and the flora. He asked if it were legitimate to discuss the various kinds of "winds"—where they came from and what they meant for crops, animals and people in the Mezquital. The fact is, I could not have formed the appropriate question that would have retrieved that kind of information from an Otomí person. I was totally unprepared for the richness of detail that the ethnography would provide, and for the questions it would answer that I would never have thought to ask.

Jesús began writing the "chapter" on the "geography" of the Mezquital. He moved around the Valley, naming communities and discussing their characteristics. Which community produces charcoal, and which produces lime for making tortillas; which communities get rain and which do not; and so on.

Three weeks into the first two-month session, Jesús finished the "chapter" on the geography and began working on the fauna of the Valley. He divided the fauna into categories

(insects, domestic fowl, predators, etc.) and made a list of creatures that he felt had to be discussed. Then he began moving through the list, systematically treating each creature, discussing its habits and characteristics, and noting any folklore associated with it. By the end of our first two-month session on the ethnography, Jesús was, by his estimate, about half way through the fauna. And what about the flora? Well, that might have to be another book.

Jesús returned to Morgantown in September 1977, for another two months and completed writing the "chapter" (now a whole book) on the fauna of the Mezquital. I worked on the translation as he wrote, and during the last ten days of the session we worked together intensively, resolving difficulties that I had with some of the translation. Jesús left for Mexico in early December 1977, and I began readying the book for publication.

Once again, the work was entered into a word processor on a mainframe computer. The University of New Mexico Press looked at the book and (to their everlasting credit) decided to take a chance. Given that I would provide them with camera-ready copy (thereby eliminating the costs of setting the book in type), they would print the volume in facing pages, English and Otomí. The book was illustrated with superb line drawings by Winfield Coleman, an anthropologist-artist who had been on the first Ixmiquilpan field school and had spent the summer in Dextho with Jesús. There was a large corpus of Otomí text for linguists; an English translation for anthropologists, folklorists, and the interested public; and beautiful drawings. Perhaps with all this, and the low cost of production, the book might be economical to publish. But it wasn't, and when we came back to the University of New Mexico Press with the second volume (on the flora of the Mezquital), they were forced to turn us down. They were sorry, but there were just not enough sales.

By now it was apparent to me that I was on the wrong track. Even a low-budget operation like NATS couldn't make it. Camera-ready copy did, indeed, reduce the costs of book production, but that wasn't enough. If Native peoples (especially those who use non-standard scripts) were to have books, then they would have to publish those books themselves, and it would have to be inexpensive enough for them to afford to do so. I began to work on the possibility of using microcomputers for the storage, retrieval, management, and printing of Native texts. Microcomputers made their appearance in 1975, and by 1978 it was apparent that they could be made to do a lot more than we had imagined.

In 1978 I proposed to the National Science Foundation and to NEH that they fund a second volume of the Otomí Ethnography. Joint funding was provided and Jesús came to the University of Florida in September 1979, to begin writing. This time I was more realistic; I did not say that we would produce "an ethnography," but that we would produce a volume on the "flora of the Mezquital Valley." By the end of the second two-month session in early December 1980, Jesús had written a volume on the major cactuses of the region. It was an excellent book; anthropologists interested in central Mexico will find it very useful; but the University of New Mexico Press could not afford to publish it in Otomí and English. Jesús and I, of course, insisted that the Otomí had to be published along with the English. Otherwise, the book would never be of use to the Otomí people—only to

anthropologists. The book was published in Spanish and Otomí by the Instituto Nacional Indigenista in Mexico (Salinas 1983).

During these years some important events were taking place. Under the government of Lopez Portillo in the 1970s, Mexico launched an ambitious new program of bilingual education. The goal was to develop bilingual educational materials and curricula for all of Mexico's Native languages. The materials would be developed by educators who were themselves members of Mexico's Native cultures and speakers of those languages. The program began with half a dozen of the most common languages and now encompasses 26 of them. As a member of the federal teacher corps, and as a published Otomí author, Jesús' skills were appropriate for this new initiative, and in January 1979, Jesús went to work in Mexico City for the Technical Division of the Bureau of Native Education, a part of the national Ministry of Education in Mexico. Since Jesús lives relatively close to the capital (about four hours) he is able to commute home on Fridays and back into the city on Monday mornings. The Technical Division of the Bureau is responsible for the development of orthographies, for production of materials and for training in-service teachers to use the materials.

There are six dialects of Otomí, and all of them are represented in the program. The group of Otomí bilingual educators took as their first task the standardizing of the orthography they would use in all the materials to be produced in the program. My carefully laid plans to foster a simple alphabet that could be typed easily and directly on any computer keyboard were overturned. And when Jesús came to Florida in the fall of 1980 (right in the middle of the second volume of the ethnography), I learned of the decision to go with an alphabet that contained many special characters. I balked and asked that we finish the second volume using the orthography that we had used for so long. Jesús agreed to finish writing the book with the now-obsolete orthography, since we were right in the middle of it anyway. All future volumes, we agreed, would use the new orthography (by then we were planning seven volumes).

There is a low-back, nasalized vowel in Otomí that is usually rendered by a phonetic character that looks like a backwards "c." Our IBM-mainframe compatible orthography used a "c." The mid-vowel sound of the "u" in the English word "but" is often rendered by an inverted "v" in phonetics. We used a "v." The new orthography used an "a" with an umlaut and an "o" with an underline for those two vowels. And there were several other, equally inconvenient (to me) changes. I convinced myself that the simple alphabet, without diacritics, was better for the Otomí, and I tried without success to convince Jesús. Actually, I was reacting to the problems that the new orthography would cause me in the computer printing of the special characters. Here I was, actually asking Jesús to adjust to the needs of the machine, while Jesús was demanding that the machine adjust to his needs, and to those of his bilingual educator colleagues. Of course, he was right.

We finished the second volume using the old, comfortable orthography. When we were turned down by the University of New Mexico Press, however, I was forced to deal with the problems of printing an exotic alphabet on a word processor. The Instituto Nacional Indigenista in Mexico offered to pub-

lish both volumes in Spanish and Otomí. They would work from my English translation and produce a Spanish version, and Jesús would go over the Spanish and check it directly with the Otomí. But if the Instituto was going to publish the work, then the entire corpus of the ethnography, including the first volume, would have to be reprinted, in camera-ready copy, using the new orthography.

Actually, making the changes was quite easy, but the result was very messy. In order to print an "o" with an underline, for example, all I had to do was to replace, globally, every instance of the letter "v" with a set of instructions in the word processor that went like this: first print the letter "o," then backspace, and then address the spoke on the daisy wheel that has the underline and print it. The result, on a low-speed, letter quality, daisy wheel printer was perfect. Unfortunately, my mainframe computer terminal did not support exotic characters (like an "o" with an underline), so the screen looked very, very messy even though the output looked terrific.

I was able to produce camera-ready copy for the Instituto, but the system was definitely not "user friendly." There was no way for an Otomí typist to see on the screen what would eventually come out on paper. That would require two things: a way to produce the special characters of Otomí (or any other language, for that matter) on a screen, using computer graphics; and a way to "dump" those graphics to a letter quality printer. And that's where current microcomputer technology comes in. That's what is meant by a "completely general" word processor. The technique is described in detail elsewhere (see Bernard and Evans 1983). Suffice it to say here that it is now possible, using easily available hardware and off-the-shelf software, to provide any people with a word processor that is compatible with their orthography. The present cost of such a system, including the machinery for printing, photocopying, and binding the output for distribution, is about \$6,000, and going down. The cost of two entire systems, allowing for total redundancy in case of breakdown, is within the reach of many ethnic organizations and tribal groups in the United States, at least. And it is within easy reach for governments of modern nations that want to provide Native cultures with the means to record their own history and folklore.

Computers will not preserve cultures. But they can be used to foster cultural pluralism and to provide people everywhere with the power to make their own bilingual educational materials, or to print pamphlets on how to grow better rice, or to record for future generations the customs and lore of those now alive. Why, after all, shouldn't people everywhere be able to do these things, given that they live in a political system that allows freedom of the press to begin with? We have presses for everything: presses to print new poets; presses to provide data on how to build geodesic domes and heat them with alternative energy technologies; presses that tell how to find jobs in the merchant marine. It seems only proper to me that minority cultures in a free society should have the means to publish their own culturally relevant materials—or not to.

I hope next to transfer this technology to Native groups (in Mexico and in the United States and Canada) that want to experiment with it. Who knows what the outcome will be? From my perspective, the least that can come of the work

we have done in Otomí is that, 50 years from now, when the Otomí people are integrated or assimilated into the national Mexican society, Jesús' books will be used as the basis of a cultural rediscovery. Judging from the reaction to Alex Haley's work (the "roots" phenomenon in this country), that is not such an unlikely event. I have no idea what else our work may bring about; but it will be interesting to find out in the years ahead.

In the meantime, Jesús has completed the Otomí version of volume three of the ethnography, a volume on the religious life of the Otomí from 1950 to the present. He has already taught one group of 50 teachers to read and write Otomí and to use the bilingual materials being produced by Mexico's Office of Native Education in the Ministry of Public Education. The Office has published first grade materials for the major languages of Mexico, and the second grade materials are in process. It is possible that, this time, bilingual education in Mexico may last. In the past it has been part of chic *indigenista* movements that had little impact on the Native peoples of Mexico; or they were part of the agenda of missionary groups. And while the current effort is clearly political, and subject to the caprice of economic and political change, this time it is largely in the hands of the people towards whom bilingual education is addressed. It just might work.

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Fieldwork Among Spanish Gypsies: A Commentary on DiGiacomo's "Luck on the Road"

by KIRSTEN WANG

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Having on several occasions between 1978 and 1983 done fieldwork among Spanish Gitano Gypsies (what Susan M. DiGiacomo calls "acculturated Spanish Gypsies"), it was with great interest that I read about her experiences with what she calls "conservative Gypsies or Rom" (DiGiacomo 1983). I was aware of the existence of differences between the two groups of Spanish Gypsies, but I did not realize that they were as different as they seem to be from her description of her stay with the Rom.

The census on Spanish Gypsies is not very reliable, but the total Gypsy population of Spain is calculated to be about 500,000, of which some 45,000 live in each of the two biggest Spanish cities, Madrid and Barcelona, and the rest are distributed all over the country. Traditionally they earned a living as horse and mule traders, tinkers, small traders, and the like, but the technical development in Spanish agriculture has made their traditional trades obsolete, and they have been forced into the big cities where they try to fend for themselves by collecting scrap metal and selling fruit, vegetables, flowers, cheap jewelry, carpets, and so forth. At harvest time they go out to the provinces to earn some extra cash as laborers. The greatest part of Spanish Gypsies are Gitanos. To quote Teresa San Roman (1975:170):

The gitanos constitute the majority of Gypsies in Spain, as distinct from the so-called "Hungarian" group, and they are subdivided into Béticos, Catalanes, Castellans and Cafeletes, but differences among them are due largely to social class, rather than to culture. Apart from nomadic Gypsies, few of them have a knowledge of Caló (the Romany language) and they resort to it mainly in the presence of payos (non-Gypsies) whom they may wish to mislead, and distinguish themselves from.

DiGiacomo's Rom are called "Hungarians" by San Roman. As will be evident, there are marked differences between the two groups. Very few Gitanos speak Romanes (the Romany Language), and they have common Spanish names like Maria or Jose, not the more exotic names which DiGiacomo mentions. A samovar is unknown among Gitanos, as their usual drink is coffee. Unmarried individuals would be a very rare occurrence and I was therefore very surprised to read about two spinsters in one family. I suppose this has also

influenced the special situation DiGiacomo encountered. In many respects the Gitanos resemble other Spaniards. However, there is no doubt that they represent a quite different ethnic group with its own culture which is very different from the dominant culture, and this difference is recognized by both Gitanos and Spaniards. Any discussion regarding which group of Gypsies is the more "authentic" is in my opinion of minor interest. My experience is that every Gypsy group in any country considers itself the only "real Gypsies." What is interesting is that two groups of Gypsies, living as close together as the Spanish Gitanos and their "cousins" the Rom or "Hungarians," should be so dissimilar and that contact between the groups is just about non-existent.

As a persecuted, marginal minority group the Gitanos are also, as I understand the "Hungarians" to be, very hostile and skeptical towards strangers and I had many difficulties in finding a group with whom I could do my fieldwork. On the other hand, once I had been accepted by the group to which I have been returning regularly during the last few years, I have had no problems and have always been accepted as a much esteemed friend. A more detailed narrative of my experience might illustrate the differences between my fieldwork with the Gitanos and DiGiacomo's problems with "her" Rom group, and perhaps serve to throw some light on what might be the reason for these contrasting experiences.

First of all, I think it is worth mentioning that my personal situation is rather different from DiGiacomo's. I presume she was perhaps in her twenties when doing her fieldwork, whereas I was over 60 and a widow with two grown-up and married daughters. I consider my personal situation to be the more advantageous for doing fieldwork among the Spanish Gitanos. I had the benefit of the respect they show towards elderly people, and I did not represent a threat to any sex or age group. Not being Spanish may also have been an advantage, as they thus did not identify me with their usual antagonists, the dominant Spanish population.

My main reasons for wanting to do fieldwork among Spanish Gitanos were my general interest in the problems of minority groups and the fact that I had lived in Spain for 12 years during an earlier stage in my life and thus knew the language and the dominant society. Apart from seeing the Gitanos in the streets and marketplaces, I had not before had any deeper knowledge of them. As is natural when starting fieldwork, I read all I could find about Gypsies generally and the Gitanos in particular. The well-known Spanish professor and gitanologist Teresa San Roman kindly gave me letters of introduction to Gitano friends of hers in different parts of Spain, and with these in my pocket I set out on a tour of Spain to find a group that would accept my staying with them. This proved to be very difficult and I repeatedly came up against the wall of defense which always raises itself whenever a stranger asks about a Gitano. They invariably reply that they have never even heard of the person you are asking about, believing that the motives for wanting contact with some specified person will certainly be suspect. When I tried to get into contact with a group, I was repeatedly told that for one reason or another it would be impossible for me to do fieldwork in their area. When I had nearly given up all hope of success, I was told that a Gitano conference was to be held in Madrid where Gitanos from all over Spain would take part. I presented myself at this conference and was very