

June 13, 2016



ILLiad TN

59950

Call #: H62 .H742 2014

Location: DREWLIB STACKS

Journal Title: Humanizing research : decolonizing
qualitative inquiry with youth and communities /

Volume: Issue:

Month/Year: 2014 Pages: 129-146

Article Author:

Article Title: Ariana Mangual Figueroa: La carta de
responsabilidad: The problem of departure.

Patron:

ILL Number: 167325389



Borrower: NJR

ODYSSEY ENABLED

Lending String:

*DRU,NJP,VXW,EEM,EYM,INU,IPL,OSU,UIU,U
PM

Charge

Maxcost: 25.00IFM

Notice: This material may
be protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

Shipping Address:

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY
ALEXANDER LIBRARY - ILL
169 COLLEGE AVE.
NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ 08901-1163

Fax:

Ariel: 165.230.139.63

Email: ilsdept@rulmail.rutgers.edu

Drew University ILL (DRU) ill@drew.edu

La Carta de Responsabilidad

7

The Problem of Departure

Ariana Mangual Figueroa

Personal narratives of researchers' entry into the field have become an integral part of ethnographic writing. In her essay on the development of the "arrival trope," Mary Louise Pratt explains that these narratives of entry serve three functions: proving that the researcher has gained the insider status needed to obtain the data presented, distinguishing between the roles of researcher and researched while enlisting the reader in the ethnographer's project of interpreting the scenes described, and demarcating the boundaries between the subjective opening anecdote and the scientific authority characteristic of the ethnographic report (1986, p. 42). This trope of arrival has carried over into a contemporary methodological focus on gaining access to the field and establishing relationships with key gatekeepers in the community being studied. According to Pratt, arrival stories are "worth looking at, especially, to people interested in countering the tendency toward alienation and dehumanization in much conventional ethnographic description" (p. 33). From this perspective, the arrival trope holds out the possibility for humanizing research because it is the place where the personal is permissible, before it is superseded by the scientific character demanded of the ethnographer.

In this essay, I take up Pratt's approach to humanizing ethnography by focusing attention on the implicit but often unacknowledged counterpart to arrival: departure. Narratives of entry presuppose that the research site is a bounded geographical location that the ethnographer can, and ultimately must, leave at the completion of the study. Our failure to account for how researchers leave the field—how they can responsibly extricate themselves from an ethnographic situation that binds the researcher and researched through ongoing processes of "colonialism, imperialism, missionization, multinational capital, global cultural flows, and travel"—is a troubling area of silence (see Gupta & Ferguson on Pratt, 1997, p. 13). Aside from occasionally observing that it's hard to leave the field, ethnographers rarely reflect on those issues we are best positioned to consider at the conclusion of our fieldwork (LeCompte, 2008, is a notable exception). We might ask, Have we acknowledged and fulfilled our responsibility to the communities who have welcomed us? Have we—in both our own opinion and the opinion of the participants—fulfilled the commitments we made at the beginning of our study?

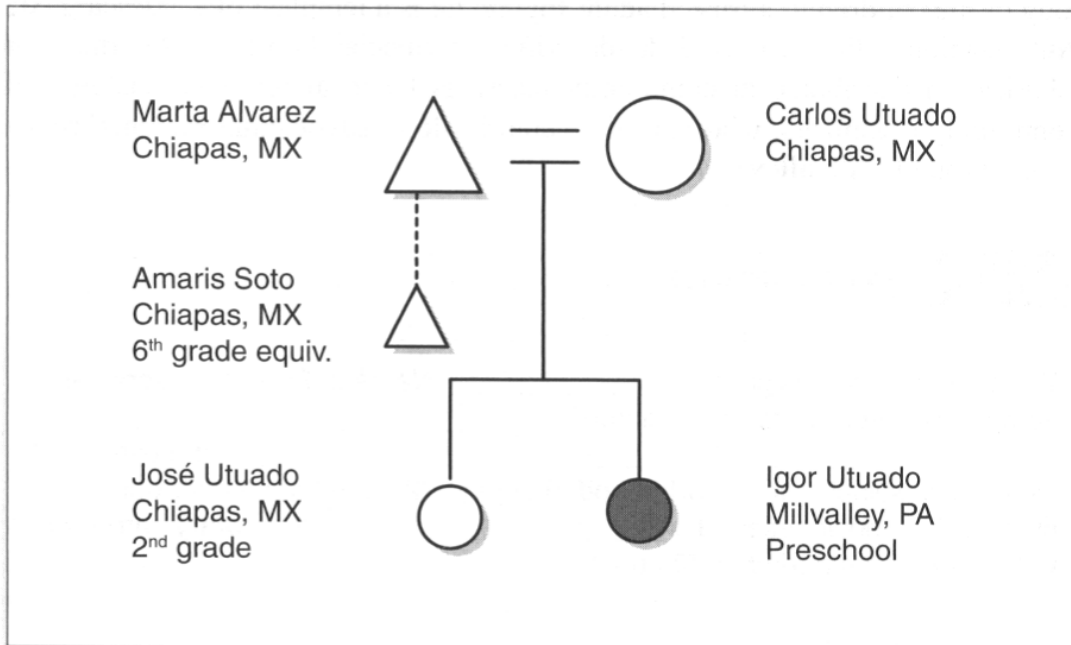
Contemporary ethnographers are working to challenge the “conventional stereotype” of the detached ethnographer (LeCompte, 1999, p. 6) by moving beyond outdated notions of researcher neutrality and calling for reciprocity between the researcher and researched. Qualitative researchers have also argued against conventional standards for scientific research in the field of education that are founded upon positivist notions that reproduce the stereotype (Eisenhart & Towne, 2003). In the following pages I recount my own exit experience, demonstrating how silence about exit denies the complex forms of interrelation that we must confront if we are to humanize our research.

For 23 months, I lived and conducted ethnographic research in an emerging Latino community in Millvalley, Pennsylvania,¹ a city that forms part of the New Latino Diaspora (Wortham, Murillo, & Hamann, 2002) of the U.S. Rust Belt. I wanted to understand the ways that juridical categories of citizenship status shaped the language socialization and educational experiences of migrant families.² After months of working alongside members of Millvalley’s Latino community as a simultaneous translator in grassroots mobilizations to protect migrants’ rights locally and to advocate for immigration reform nationally, I invited four mixed-status Mexican families to participate in my study. Mixed-status families include a combination of undocumented migrant and U.S.-born members, as well as others in various stages of applying for U.S. citizenship (Fix & Zimmerman, 2001). The mixed-status families living in Millvalley were typical of those residing in emerging Latino communities—they included undocumented parents and an older undocumented sibling who had crossed the border from Mexico into the U.S., and younger siblings born in the U.S. (Passel & Cohn, 2009). These younger siblings had been granted U.S. citizenship by birth, also known as *jus soli* citizenship (Bloemraad, Korteweg, & Yurdakal, 2008).

This essay focuses on my interactions with one family, the Utuado-Alvarez family. Figure 7.1 depicts the kinship relations and migratory statuses of the parents and siblings at the time of the study. In this diagram, a triangle represents a female relative and a circle represents a male relative. Two horizontal lines indicate a marriage bond while a single vertical line denotes a descent bond. A single, solid horizontal line indicates a co-descent bond. In addition to these traditional notations (see O’Neil, 2008), I have added two symbols relevant to my study: First, a dotted vertical line signifies that the child still lived in Mexico while the parents lived in the U.S. Second, shading indicates citizenship: The shaded geometric symbols denote U.S.-born children, while the unshaded symbols indicate undocumented migrant family members born in Mexico. This mirrors the way that the family talked about migratory status: The term *ciudadano* (“citizen”) implied American citizenship, and family members rarely, if ever, talked about being Mexican citizens. A person who was a Mexican citizen was almost always referred to as someone who lacked U.S. citizenship, who did not have papers, or who was not legal.

I came to know the Utuado-Alvarez family very well as a participant observer, and sometimes as an advocate, during routine after-school activities that took

Figure 7.1 The Utuado-Alvarez family



place at home, in community settings, and in a variety of public spaces. On several occasions, Marta and Carlos, both undocumented parents, talked with me about something they referred to as *la carta* (“the letter”). This letter would itself become a symbolic site invested with all the challenges of departing from the domestic field of a mixed-status family living with the very real fear of deportation and family separation. At different points in the study, Marta and Carlos spoke about two versions of *la carta*: One was a document that migrant parents could draft in order to grant another adult temporary custody of José and Igor in the event of detention or deportation. Although this document would not be legally binding, the notarized letter would certify that Marta, Carlos, and the specified person had agreed that the person would care for the children until the parents were released from detention or would travel with the children to Mexico to reunite with the parents if they were deported. The other version of *la carta* involved finding a U.S. citizen who would consent to adopt the two boys legally; this would allow the adoptive parent to submit an application for José, their eldest undocumented child, to become a U.S. citizen. In this case, Marta and Carlos wanted to remain the primary caregivers for their sons, but hoped that the adoption would grant José access to the rights that U.S.-born Igor already possessed. The adoptive parent would become the brothers’ temporary guardian in the event of detention or deportation.

With the occurrence of an increasing number of deportations leading to family separations in the Millvalley Latino community during the spring of 2009, community leaders began encouraging mixed-status families to develop a family plan

that included provisions for childcare in the event of detention or deportation. The plan would include the notarized version of *la carta* that granted temporary custody of the children to a trusted adult. Figure 7.2 is a template of a “Descarga de Autorizaciones Para El Cuidado de Niños” (“Special Power of Attorney for Childcare”) distributed at community meetings by local religious leaders and community organizers, who played a central role in advocating migrants’ rights in and around Millvalley.³

Figure 7.2 *La carta* template

We are writing to designate, _____ (Name of Person) to serve as a Temporary caregiver for our children _____, _____, _____, _____, _____ in the event that we are unavailable for a short period of time (1-72 hours) to care for our children. The designation of _____ as our temporary caregiver will not exceed a period of 72 hours.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely, _____ and _____
(Name of Parent or Parents)

Date: _____

The Utuado-Alvarez parents hoped to find a trusted adult with U.S. citizenship that would agree to be named in a document like the one pictured here, or who would be willing to initiate the legal process of adopting José and Igor. As I will show, *la carta* calls all the bluffs of an ethnographer: objectivity, independence, and mobility. My wrestling with how to manage the request that I sign *la carta* and thus formalize a substantial role within the family after the conclusion of my research forced me to confront the question of ethnographic exit in deeply humanized ways—a question for which my academic training left me largely unprepared.

ENCOUNTERING *LA CARTA*

The first time that I heard about *la carta* was on a Saturday morning in February 2009, as I sat in Marta and Carlos’s living room drinking coffee and debriefing after a visit to a nearby car dealership. I had translated between Marta and a

salesman as she inquired about the possibility of buying a used minivan. Marta was eager to buy a vehicle because the brutal winter was taking its toll on the family; every day, they had to wait outside for Igor's bus to pick him up and drop him off from preschool, and they had to walk José to and from elementary school. The conversation was not unlike others I had translated for Marta. Once the salesman began listing the kinds of identification Marta would need to provide in order to complete the transaction (in this case, a Pennsylvania driver's license or international driver's license and visa), she turned to me and said, "*Ok, dile que lo pensamos y ya vamos*" ("OK, tell him we'll think about it and let's go now"). As undocumented migrants, Marta and Carlos did not have these forms of identification; moreover, they were afraid of letting strangers find out about their migratory status. As we walked up the hill to their house, Marta called an undocumented friend who had purchased cars in neighboring Ohio to ask if he would drive the family to one of his trusted dealerships across the state border.

During our conversation about their possible trip to Ohio, Marta recounted an exchange that she, José, and Igor had recently had on one of their wintry walks home from José's elementary school (recall that Igor, their younger son, was a U.S.-born citizen). On this walk, Marta told the boys that she had a *carta que iba escribir con un abogado* (letter that she was going to draft with a lawyer). She told them that the letter *se trata de que va pasar a ustedes si algo nos pasa* ("has to do with what will happen to you both if something happens to us"). Igor asked what kinds of things could happen, and José answered, "*Si se mueren o si los agarra la policía*" ("If they die or if the police catches them"). Marta explained that "*como nosotros no tenemos papeles nos pueden devolver a México*" ("since we don't have papers, they can send us back to Mexico"). José added that if that happened, "*se tendría que ir a México porque la abuela es la única que nos cuida bien*" ("we would have to go to Mexico because Grandma is the only one who takes good care of us"). As they continued talking, José proposed, "*¿Por qué no le dices a la abuela que venga y nos cuide acá?*" ("Why don't you tell Grandma to come and take care of us here?") Marta had replied that some things were easier said than done. Igor, Marta recounted with a laugh, had one final plea: "*Pero si nosotros vamos a México, escribe en la carta que nos gusta pizza y dulces*" ("But if we have to go to Mexico, the letter should say that we like pizza and candy"). Carlos joined in the laughter, too.

I didn't know it at the time, but this first mention of *la carta* foreshadowed subsequent conversations in which Marta and Carlos would ask me to consider taking custody of José and Igor in the case of detention or deportation. What was immediately apparent in this exchange was how much the family thought about drafting *la carta*, and how involved José and Igor were in constructing the terms of this contingency plan. Although much of what we know about undocumented Latino youth indicates that they confront the realities of their undocumented status in adolescence when applying for driver's licenses or financial aid for college (Gonzalez, 2008), this exchange demonstrates that young undocumented and U.S.-born children of migrants are active participants in everyday conversations

about migratory status (Bhimji, 2005; Mangual Figueroa, 2011). Children, along with their parents, express their fears about deportation and find ways to cope with the anxiety produced by knowing that undocumented family members are under the constant threat of state surveillance. Planning for *la carta* was a strategy that the Utuado-Alvarez family pursued in order to maintain their kinship ties and family cohesion in the face of state policies that threatened to separate them.

REVISITING *LA CARTA*

Over a year later, on a spring day in April 2010, I met Marta, Carlos, José, and Igor at the preschool that Igor attended. In the 14 months that had elapsed, I had accompanied the family to many other meetings, where they played an active role in Millvalley's public life. During these events, I often served as a simultaneous translator to help facilitate the family's participation in events such as parent-teacher conferences at José's school, grassroots meetings on migratory reform, and planning sessions for parents interested in founding Millvalley's first state-funded community-based social service agency for Latino families. We also spent many afternoons in the Utuado-Alvarez home sharing meals, completing school-related tasks, and talking about the everyday realities that the family members faced living and working in Millvalley.

As I had explained to them in previous conversations, this was one of the last times that I would visit with the family. I was traveling to California the following month to defend my dissertation and attend graduation and, although I would be returning to Millvalley briefly, I would soon be moving to New York City to begin a new academic position. Marta had invited me to join them for this month's parent meeting because she knew I would be interested in the immigration discussion on the agenda. She explained to me that Alexis, the program director, was hesitant about my coming because the topic was highly sensitive and the parents' migratory status was confidential; but Marta had assured her that I was a trusted friend. There were around 10 families present at this reunion. The undocumented Mexican and Central American mothers and fathers gathered in a room on the first floor of the center while childcare volunteers entertained the children in the upstairs classrooms. The meeting began when Alexis welcomed everyone and made several announcements about upcoming events, including the end-of-year celebration for the children moving on to kindergarten in the fall.

After making her opening remarks, Alexis quickly moved to the heart of the agenda. She explained that she had been thinking a lot about recent events in the Millvalley community in which Latino migrants had been detained and separated from their families in the process. She expressed concern about what would happen to the students enrolled in the program if their parents were deported. She strongly urged the parents to do two things: first, to find a trusted family member or friend who was a U.S. citizen and who would care for the children in the event that they were deported, and second, to have a lawyer draft

a *carta de responsabilidad* (“letter of responsibility”) that would give the U.S. citizen the power of attorney over the children’s well-being in the event of deportation. The message was clear—the parents ought to have a plan in place so that someone could return their children to them in Mexico or Central America. Alexis asserted that the letter was one way to avoid having the children placed in the U.S. foster care system and to minimize the risk of not being reunited as a family.⁴ Marta alternated between burying her head in her hands and looking up and despairingly asking, “*Pero ¿quién va hacer eso?*” (“But, who is going to do that?”). Marta and Carlos worried that no *ciudadanos americanos* (American citizens) would be willing to accept this responsibility; and yet, it was quite possible that their family’s survival might depend on this act of goodwill.

When the meeting ended, the Utuado-Alvarez family and I exited the preschool and stood in the parking lot conversing. As the children played around us, Marta and Carlos thought out loud about who they could ask to be named in *la carta*. After listing several members of their church parish, they explained that someone like me would be a great fit. They enumerated the following reasons: They knew me and trusted me, I knew the children very well, I was familiar with U.S. systems like education and travel, and I was married and employed. It was entirely reasonable for Marta and Carlos to consider me for this role, given all of the reasons that they articulated; while I immediately began to wonder about the ethics of assuming this role as an ethnographer, they did not share the same concerns about what constituted appropriate boundaries between the researcher and researched.

I had often considered the relevance of the “participant-observer paradox”—how the presence of an ethnographer invariably influences the activities she observes (Duranti, 1997, p. 118)—to this project in which I intentionally defined participation as collaboration and advocacy, privileging reciprocity over objectivity. I had decided at the outset of the project that I would reciprocate the family’s generous participation by serving as a translator whenever they asked me to; this helped the family in their interactions with service providers, teachers, and business owners whenever I was present. Translation was a form of exchange that remained inextricable from my study of language socialization; formed the basis for my first interaction with Marta at a grassroots meeting, where I translated as she spoke out in favor of migratory reform; and constituted a valued form of social capital that I could share. The request to be named in *la carta* went beyond reciprocity based on a series of ongoing but nonbinding exchanges; it attempted to formalize a commitment that would change the relationships between our families in a more permanent way.

I listened as Marta and Carlos spoke, but I did not respond to their implied question of whether I would be willing to assume this responsibility. Instead, I asked a lot of questions about other families they knew who had drafted *la carta*. The conversation remained unresolved that afternoon, but we decided to continue our visits once I returned from California. We all knew that my trip out

west marked the beginning of my transition out of the field, and this meeting was a poignant reminder of the tension involved in doing so. The Utuado-Alvarez family had many accomplishments to celebrate—Igor was entering kindergarten next year, both boys were going to be baptized in the coming weeks, and Marta and Carlos were studying English. And yet, while they had successes to celebrate, they continued to live with the fears particular to being a mixed-status family. Meanwhile, I maintained the privilege of entering and exiting their lives at will; as a U.S. citizen and ethnographer, I had all the mobility their family lacked.

I continued to reflect on the question of *la carta* while in California. On the one hand, I felt assuming such a role would be inappropriate; on the other hand, I felt I might be failing the family. Why did signing *la carta* seem like an impossible responsibility when I knew and cared for the family so deeply? I considered what steps I could take and wondered, was this just a question of my personal preference or were there scholarly guidelines to consider? What would it mean if existing approaches to conducting educational research could not adequately address the exigencies of this ethnographic moment, and what would be the consequence of deviating from established practices?

REEXAMINING LA CARTA

When I returned to Millvalley in early June, I arranged to make one of my last field visits to the Utuado-Alvarez home. All of the family members were present that day; except for the weather, it was much like that visit in 2009 when I'd first heard of *la carta*. Over the course of the year, Marta and Carlos had become interested not only in finding a temporary custodian for José and Igor in the event of deportation, but also in the possibility of having a U.S. citizen adopt the two children. They had also shifted from simply mentioning the idea of *la carta* to me in casual conversation to explicitly asking me to become an adoptive parent. On this afternoon, Marta and Carlos asked if I would consider this possibility and, about an hour into the visit, I recorded the following exchange between us. The transcript begins just after Carlos excuses himself from the conversation because he is going to sleep, exhausted from working all night cleaning a local movie theater.

Example 1:⁵

Sequence A:

- 1 Ariana: *Pues me alegro verlo Carlos (.) nos vemos en julio*
Well I'm glad to see you Carlos. We'll see each other in July.
- 2 Marta: *[El o::tro mes*
Next month

- 3 Carlos: [Oh::: en julio! ((laughs))
Oh in July!
- 4 Ariana: *Se va volando el [tiempo*
Time flies
- 5 Carlos: [Se cuida, se cuida [mucho=
Take care of yourself, take good care
- 6 Ariana: [Igua::l [mente
You too
- 7 Carlos: [=porque queremos.
que siga.
because we want you
to continue
- 8 *alegrándonos. la vida. y dándonos esper[anza*
bringing joy to our lives. and giving us hope.
- 9 Ariana: [Igua::lmente
Same to you
- 10 Marta: [Y que lo PIEN[ses
And that you'll think
about it
- 11 Ariana: [Ustedes
You all
- 12 *para mi [son-*
for me are
- 13 Marta: [con tu esposo PORfavor↓
with your husband please
- 14 Ariana: OK↓

This sequence highlights the interactional resources that Marta, Carlos, and I used to negotiate the tension surrounding *la carta*, a tension heightened by my impending departure from the field and from Millvalley. Throughout our exchange, we asserted and adapted our positions about three main topics: the timeline for my departure, the terms of our relationships with one another, and the proposed adoption.

As I said good-bye to Carlos, I noted that I would return the following month. (I had decided to visit the focal families once a month instead of once a week in this transitional period.) Marta and Carlos emphasized their disapproval of the time frame by elongating the vowel sound, as in “That’s a loooong time!” (lines 2 and 3), and I tried to minimize their concern by responding with the adage “Time flies” (line 4). As Carlos issued the parting phrase “Take care,” he also

named one of the central problems of the departure—understanding that the study was drawing to a close while wanting me to continue being a part of the family's life (lines 7 and 8). Marta identified exactly how I could continue to give the family hope despite the study's ending—by considering the adoption request (line 10) and talking it over with my husband (line 13). Marta's lowered tone conveyed the seriousness of her request, and I honored that by affirming that I would consider their request in a similar tone of voice (line 14). As we continued talking, Carlos attempted to lighten the mood and tenor of our conversation.

Sequence B:

15 Carlos: NO [NO=

16 Marta: [NO es una obligación pero es [como una *plática*
No it's not an obligation but it's like a conversation

17 Carlos: [=fue todo muy *pesa:::do* y
it was all too serious and

18 *obligato:::rio*
obligatory

19 Marta: >No no no no no no no no< *no*

20 Ariana: Yo no. [Yo entiendo°. Yo entiendo°.
I don't. I understand. I understand.

21 Marta: [Yo no me refiero a que- yo quiero hacerlo contigo. Con otras personas (.)
I don't mean that I want to do it with you. With other people.

22 *QUIEN ACEpte*↑=
Whoever accepts.

23 Ariana: Mm-hmm

24 Marta: =que *DIGA*↑. *Está bien empecemos ese procedimiento* [legal
who says That's fine let's start the legal process

25 Carlos: [Para nosotros era más
For us it was more

26 *justo que fuera ustedes*
fair that it be you (pl.)

27 Ariana: [Gracias=
Thank you

- 28 **Marta:** [Sí
Yes
- 29 **Ariana:** [=es un honor que me lo pregunten. Sí::: yo hablo con é:::l y to:::-do
it's an honor that you ask me. Yes I'll speak to him and everything
- 30 **Carlos:** Sí. Si por casualidad diga su esposo. Uy es muy interesante. [O::: O:::
Yes. If by chance your husband says. Oh it's very interesting. Oh Oh
- 31 *Sería la bendición de Dios.*
It would be a blessing from God.
- 32 **Ariana:** Yah
- 33 **Carlos:** *Porqué? Porque. Usted? Ya lo empezó a conocer? conocer a los niños? o al niño?*
Why? Because. You? You've begun to know him. know the children. or the child?
- 34 *Y este-simplemente sería un gran favor. Un gran favor.*
And um it would simply be a huge favor. A huge favor.

As our exchange continued, we tried to reconcile the exigency of Marta and Carlos's request with my inability to respond definitively in the moment. Carlos attempted to change the tone of the conversation; while we all knew that the proposal was not to be taken lightly, he wanted to make it sound easily feasible (just like a big favor, line 34). Marta tried to follow Carlos's lead, but it was hard for her not to express a sense of urgency as she noted that she hoped to find *anyone* who would be willing to adopt the children (line 22). Both Carlos and Marta modeled what they hoped that my husband or I would say: either that we would agree to initiate the adoption proceedings, or at the very least find the proposition interesting and be open to further conversation (lines 24 and 30).

The moment when Carlos explained why he hoped that I would agree to sign this version of *la carta* marks the culmination of our conversations about this document (line 26). From his perspective, it was precisely because of my role as ethnographer—participating in the family's everyday life and getting to know the children well—that made me an ideal candidate for becoming an adoptive parent. And yet for me, my identity as ethnographer was defined by my being in the field and was dependent on the fact that I could enter or exit it. This conceptualization of the field would be fundamentally changed by adopting José and Igor, and it was this potentially permanent connection that Marta and Carlos

hoped to achieve through adoption. My attempts to express compassion and understanding (line 20) and to reframe the grave request as an honor (line 29) did not offer any resolution to the question of adoption. While I agreed to consider the possibility, I did not furnish either of the responses that Carlos and Marta hoped I would provide.

I felt confused and upset when I left the Utuado-Alvarez home that afternoon—on the one hand I felt that this request upset the delicate balance of intimacy and distance that the family and I had established throughout the course of the study, and on the other hand I believed that this was a legitimate request in could not be ignored. I was moved by the proposal, even though I knew that adopting José and Igor was a tremendous responsibility that I could not assume at the time, but I was troubled to find myself in many ways unprepared for the request. This led me to reflect on how comparatively little my formal education had prepared me to negotiate relationships and responsibilities beyond the traditional confines of the field. While I had engaged the family in a reciprocal exchange of participation and translation during the course of this study, exchanges that strengthened the ties upon which the ethnographic study depended, I expected the intensity of the exchanges to gradually decrease as I prepared to exit the field. I assumed that the detachment and neutrality that I knew was unobtainable (and undesirable) during fieldwork would become more available to me as I stepped out of the field and into the next stage of writing up the results of my study. It was as if I had suddenly confronted all of the dilemmas that constitute Pratt's arrival trope at the moment of exit.

I saw the Utuado-Alvarez family once more before I moved away from Millvalley when I met them at the weekly Spanish-language mass held in a local Catholic church frequented by many members of Millvalley's Latino community. After the mass, I talked with Marta and Carlos; we chatted about my move to New York City and about the family's summer plans. A few weeks before, I had called the central office of the Millvalley Public School District on Marta's behalf to find out if José would receive free transportation to and from the summer school classes that he had been asked to attend; Marta brought me up to speed, letting me know that she had received a letter confirming the school bus route and schedule. Marta began looking around for José and Igor to call them over to give me a hug, but before she could step away I reiterated how thankful I was for all their generosity throughout the last two years. I explained that I had thought more about *la carta* and that, while I was honored to have been considered for that role, I would not be able to make that legal commitment to the family.

I felt that it was impossible to adequately express the complex set of emotions and concerns that I had grappled with as I made my decision. As a result, I simply stated it and did not try to explain the fact that, in the midst of moving, my husband and I didn't feel prepared to take on the responsibility of adoption; that I couldn't reconcile forging this relationship with one focal family and not others (if they were to ask); that there were many other considerations I was wrestling with. Marta and Carlos didn't seem at all surprised in

the moment. They wished me well in New York and reminded me to stay in touch. Marta ushered José and Igor over and I said good-bye to them, weaving my way through the congregation, stopping to talk with other families along the way, and then finally exiting the church and returning home. As I left, I felt disappointed—not about my decision, but about my inability to account for it in a way that I felt Marta and Carlos deserved—and I felt the acute insufficiency of just saying good-bye and walking away.

REFLECTING ON LA CARTA

While the conversation about *la carta* concluded when I said good-bye to the family that afternoon (I have talked and visited with them since July 2010, but neither they nor I have broached the subject again), the methodological issues raised by my conversations with the Utuado-Alvarez family remain unresolved. Discussions about *la carta* are significant because they call into question the terms of the relationships established by ethnographers and families while highlighting the possibilities and limitations of ethnographic research. Throughout the course of the study, the Utuado-Alvarez family and I had grown very close; they generously opened their homes and hearts to me, and I became both a participant and advocate during our everyday interactions. These exchanges led to the mutual understanding and care upon which humanizing ethnography depends. And yet, during conversations about *la carta*, I confronted the limits of what I was able to do as an individual and of my conceptual vocabulary for managing such issues around exit.

During these discussions, Marta and Carlos acknowledged the deep trust that we had developed throughout the course of the study as well as the emotional content that was inextricable from the particular social phenomena that I was documenting (in this case, talk about migratory status). By proposing that I agree to be named in *la carta*, the parents identified the kinds of social capital that they believed I could leverage to help improve the family's lived experience in the U.S.—privileges associated with my juridical status as a Puerto Rican woman, my class and marital status, and my role as an advocate for them in the educational and social landscape of Millvalley. Meanwhile, I struggled to find a responsible way to relate to the family that sincerely conveyed my solidarity with them while honestly and lovingly expressing my limitations in terms of signing *la carta*.

Looking across the three events that I have described in this essay, we can see that Marta and Carlos developed and discussed two versions of *la carta* that could serve as resourceful strategies to protect their family. By considering the possibilities of either drafting a document that would grant someone temporary custody of their children or initiating a legally binding adoption process that could preserve kinship bonds otherwise threatened by a state that classifies some members as legal U.S. citizens and others as illegal migrants, the family sought

to manage the surveillance and threat of deportation that they faced on a daily basis. The version of *la carta* that Marta and Carlos presented me upon exiting was an inversion of the documents that I had asked them to sign upon my arrival—binding contracts approved by my university's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS). In the same way that I mitigated any liability associated with participation in the project at its outset, the parents' proposal was a way of legally foreclosing my typical exit from the field. The appearance and reappearance of *la carta* throughout the course of the fieldwork evinces the importance of this opportunity for the family. It is significant however, that even though *la carta* was referenced multiple times throughout the study, it was not until the very end of the study that they explicitly asked if I would agree to be named in the document.

My goal in recounting this complex of issues is not to offer any concise resolution, but rather to break the silence surrounding the moment of departure in the ethnographic process so that we can begin to raise the urgent questions it raises. Creating the conditions needed to talk about leaving the field is a necessary component of humanizing research because it entails "push[ing] against inequities not only through the findings of research but through the research act itself" (Paris, 2011, p. 140). Scholars working to humanize research have already begun to encourage us to critically rethink the research process and to reexamine particular phases of the ethnographic experience, including participant selection (Paris, 2011), inquiry, and bearing witness (Winn & Ubiles, 2010). Departure is an ethnographic moment that warrants close attention because it foregrounds many of the inequalities inherent in the research process. The most obvious inequities rendered visible in discussions about *la carta* involve the differences between U.S. citizens and noncitizens and the ability to be able to set the terms of engagement with the everyday issues faced by migrant families. If we began to have frank and difficult conversations about leaving the field, we would be better prepared to face these inequities while still present. We would also be able to discover which types of inequalities are generalizable to ethnographic work and which ones might be particular to certain sites (such as the focus on juridical citizenship in my own work).

Initiating this conversation first requires a frank discussion of why this aspect of the process tends to be passed over in silence. Are we afraid to concede failure? Recounting challenging encounters with participants during a study's closure or reporting negative exchanges during exit interviews or member checks would mean relinquishing some of the narrative control of the ethnographer—namely, the power to represent our research in a positive light, smoothing over the tensions that emerge between researcher and researched. Could it be that we are ashamed to account for the ways in which our actions, in or out of the field, contribute to the marginalization of the communities that we study or at least fail to improve the families' circumstances (even though we may hope to advocate for these communities during and after the research)? As Pratt recognized over four decades ago, humanizing research involves challenging the persistent dichotomy between the personal and scientific, or subjective and objective,

modes of ethnographic research. Our continued silence around departure gives the researcher the last word in a way that preserves an aura of objectivity.

Calling into question the notion of exiting the field will encourage us to break down the artificial distance between the researcher and researched and force us to examine whether our existing methods honor the humanity that we share with our research participants, colleagues, and students. But what would it mean to bring departure to the forefront of our methodological conversations? What scholarly activities would need revision in order to incorporate these conversations into our research practice? One place to begin would be in the ethnographic training or the dissertation defense required of our graduate students. What if these milestone moments included an explicit discussion of departure? We could consider raising the question of feasibility—currently limited to recruiting participants and carrying out the research—in terms of exiting the field and closing the study. We might begin to conceive of “feasibility” not only in terms of access and implementation but also in relation to those possibilities our research holds for recognizing and strengthening the humanity of those we research as well as ourselves. Would we need to revise our CPHS or Institutional Review Board (IRB) processes for gaining institutional approval for our research? Currently this application focuses on documenting how we will gain admission to a field site, while closing a study entails filling out a one-page form. Working to institutionalize our scholarly concerns about the ethics of departure could lead to more preparation and deliberation in this area. The responsibilities of *la carta* were too much for me to accept as an individual, but that doesn’t mean it is obvious that humanizing research shouldn’t involve some creative problem solving alongside our participants. For example, what if a multifamily study run through an institution or group of researchers involved a coordinated effort to offer services to mixed-status communities in the event of deportation for a period during or following the study? Debating the merits of—and strategies for—such arrangements would require talking about departure (or complicating the very concept of departure) in advance of and during the course of the ethnographic process.

Another site for investigation could be the publishing process. What if peer viewers routinely raised the question of how the author negotiated the complexity of exit? In conference presentations and peer reviews of my writing, I am often asked to account for how I gained access into a mixed-status community and what measures I take to protect the anonymity of the undocumented family members. These questions are important ones; they are also an indication of ethnographers’ continued focus on entry narratives and the particular emphasis placed on anonymity when field sites are geographically proximal and potentially recognizable. As of yet, no one has asked me to consider the politics of maintaining or breaking relations with families with whom I’ve been involved. No one except for, as we have seen, the families themselves.

Humanizing research requires not relying on outmoded conventions in order to dodge difficult questions. As claims of objectivity and the very nature of the “field” continue to come under scrutiny, we have nevertheless organized ethnographies around tropes of arrival without attending to the complexities of departure.

I was surprised by my own lack of preparedness when a family confronted me with the question of my responsibilities after the formal conclusion of my fieldwork. I still don't feel I was in a position to sign *la carta*, but I should have at least been in a position to account for my decision in terms that were neither merely personal—implying that the question had no bearing on my research—nor reliant on the traditional defense of scholarly distance. Reorienting research to bring the notion of departure within the domain of scholarly discussion is an important step toward acknowledging that families can and do make claims on researchers that extend beyond fieldwork and demand serious consideration. Perhaps integrating the problem of departure into our scholarship and teaching will involve a confrontation with how “the field” itself is an increasingly shaky construct when a researcher's tax dollars support a militarized border (Massey, 2005) and the researcher's produce is often picked by migrant child laborers (Patel, Hill, Eslocker, & Ross, 2009).

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree that the process of “exiting the field” has been underexamined in educational anthropology? If so, why? If not, how have you as a researcher been trained to negotiate your departure from a research site?
2. What scholarly and pedagogical activities—in addition to those mentioned in the conclusion of the chapter—would need to be changed in order to bring questions of departure into our research practice?
3. How have you articulated the scope and significance of your project to participants, and how have their responses shaped your research? At what moments in the research process have participants expressed their goals and expectations for your relationship?
4. Is the traditional metaphor of the “field”—a site that one can enter and exit—applicable to contemporary research in current conditions of globalization? How can we adapt longstanding anthropological concerns regarding ethics and reciprocity to such conditions?

NOTES

1. Pseudonyms have been assigned to all of the locations, institutions, and people in and around Millvalley.
2. In their 1996 book, *Immigrant America: A Portrait*, Portes and Rumbaut distinguished between *migrants* who crossed the border into the U.S. by land and *immigrants* who entered the U.S. with legal documentation by land, air, or water. The term *migrant* also refers to the temporal and spatial relationships of the individual(s) to the host country—migrants include those with residential impermanence and active cultural frames of reference that cross national borders, while *immigrant* describes those who have permanently

relocated and have begun a process of cultural assimilation (Arzubiaga, Noguerón, & Sullivan, 2009; Lukose, 2007). The Mexican-born family members in this study entered the U.S. without legal permission by crossing the Mexico-U.S. border by land, maintained active relationships with family in both Mexico and the U.S., and had family members or friends who returned to Mexico throughout the course of this study; therefore, I refer to them as migrants or undocumented migrants.

3. This template is an excerpt from a training manual titled *Family Safety Planning* and published by the Washington, DC-based Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC). The manual was used by some of Millvalley's church leaders and community organizers as they worked to educate migrant families on their rights and helped them to plan for an unforeseen detention or deportation. This resource can be found online (<http://cliniclegal.org/resources/family-safety-planning-training-manual>).

4. The November 2011 report, titled *Shattered Families* and published by the Applied Research Center (Freed Wessler, 2011), examines the connections between policies of immigration enforcement and the placement of children in foster care. The report estimates that approximately 5,100 children of migrants have been placed in the U.S. foster care system upon the deportation of their parents; the number is expected to rise dramatically in the next five years (p. 6).

5. I adhered to the following transcription conventions. It is important to note that "the punctuation marks are *not* used grammatically, but to indicate intonation" (Schegloff, 2007, p. 267).

(.)	"micropause"	CAPS	especially loud talk
.	falling, or final intonation contour	O	talk following was quiet or soft
?	rising intonation	↑↓	sharper intonation rises or falls
::	prolongation of the preceding sound	(())	transcriber's description of events
_	stress or emphasis	-	cut off prior word or sound
[a point of overlap onset]	the end of a point of overlap

REFERENCES

- Arzubiaga, A., Noguerón, S. & Sullivan, A. (2008). The education of children in im/migrant families. *Review of Research in Education*, 33(1), 246–271.
- Bhimji, F. (2005). Language socialization with directives in two Mexican immigrant families in South Central Los Angeles. In A. C. Zentella (Ed.), *Building on strength: Language and literacy in Latino families and communities* (pp. 60–76). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Bloemraad, I., Korteweg, A., & Yurdakal, G. (2008). Citizenship and immigration: Multiculturalism, assimilation, and challenges to the nation-state. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 34 (8), 1–27.
- Duranti, A. (1997). Ethnographic methods. In *Linguistic anthropology: A reader* (pp. 84–121). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

- Eisenhart, M., & Towne, L. (2003). Contestation and change in national policy on “scientifically based” educational research. *Educational Researcher*, 32(7), 31–38.
- Fix, M., & Zimmerman, W. (2001). All under one roof: Mixed-status families in an era of reform. *International Migration Review*, (35)2, 397–419.
- Freed Wessler, S. (2011, November). *Shattered families: The perilous intersection of immigration enforcement and the child welfare system*. New York, NY: Applied Research Center.
- Gonzales, R. G. (2008). Left out but not shut down: Political activism and the undocumented student movement. *Northwestern Journal of Law and Social Policy*, 3, 219–239.
- Gupta, A., & Ferguson, J. (Eds.). (1997). *Anthropological locations: Boundaries and grounds of a field science*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- LeCompte, M. D. (1999). Researcher roles. In M. D. LeCompte, J. J. Schensul, M. R. Weeks, & M. Singer (Volume Ed.), *Ethnographer's toolkit: Vol. 6. Researcher roles and research partnerships* (pp. 2–72). Lanham, MD: Altamira Press.
- LeCompte, M. D. (2008). Negotiating exit. In L. Given (Series Ed.), *Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research: Vol. 2* (pp. 552–555). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Lukose, K. (2007). The difference that diaspora makes: Thinking through the anthropology of immigrant education in the United States. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 38(4), 405–418.
- Mangual Figueroa, A. (2011). Citizenship and education in the homework completion routine. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 42(3), 263–280.
- Massey, D. S. (2005, June). *Backfire at the border: Why enforcement without legalization cannot stop illegal immigration*. Washington, DC: Center for Trade Policy Studies.
- O’Neil, D. (2008). *KINSHIP: An introduction to descent systems and family organization*. Retrieved December 12, 2011, from <http://anthro.palomar.edu/kinship/default.htm>
- Paris, D. (2011). “A friend who understand fully”: Notes on humanizing research in a multiethnic youth community. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 24(2), 137–149.
- Passel, J. S., & Cohn, D. (2009, April). *A portrait of unauthorized immigrants in the United States*. Washington DC: Pew Hispanic Center.
- Patel, A., Hill, A., Eslocker, A., & Ross, B. (2009, October 30). *ABC News investigation: The blueberry children*. Retrieved September 8, 2011, from <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/young-children-working-blueberry-fields-walmart-severs-ties/story?id=8951044>
- Portes, A., & Rumbaut, R. (1996). *Immigrant America: A Portrait*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Pratt, M. L. (1986). Fieldwork in common places. In J. Clifford & G. M. Marcus (Eds.), *Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography* (pp. 27–50). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Schegloff, E. A. (2007). *Sequence organization in interaction: A primer in conversation analysis* (Vol. 1). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Winn, M. T., & Ubiles, J. R. (2010). Worthy witnessing: Collaborative research in urban classrooms. *Studying diversity in teacher education* (pp. 295–308). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Wortham, S., Murillo, E.G., & Hamann, E. (Eds.). (2002). *Education in the new Latino diaspora: Policy and the politics of identity*. Westport, CT: Ablex.