Racial Ideologies and Racial Methodologies

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Methodology is too important to be left to methodologists.

—Howard Becker

Race was always salient and part of the dynamic in my interviews, because of and in spite of the subject matter of the study.

—Sylvia Tamale

My success as an ethnographer necessitated a continual negotiation of role expectations based on my light pigmentation, my femaleness, my middle-class status, and my American citizenship.

—Faye Harrison

In January 1992 I went to a small town in the interior of the state of Rio de Janeiro to conduct field research on race and racism. In planning for this trip, I had consulted with graduate student colleagues and scholars who specialized in Brazilian Studies. In giving advice, no one had suggested that racism might be a factor in field research.[1] In fact, some had even suggested that race, or at least my phenotype, would be an advantage. In my field research, I still vividly remember one graduate student's encouraging words: "They will love you in Brazil because you'll be a *mulatta* there."

Despite these silences and "assurances" I did not go to Brazil expecting to find a racial paradise. Having informed myself of the experiences of other U.S. black anthropologists working in Latin America and the Caribbean I thought I was prepared for the multiple ways that my body might be coded as a light-skinned black American (Bolles 1985; Whitehead 1986; Harrison 1991; Gilliam 1970). However, what I had not anticipated was the suspicion, distrust, and racism to which I would be subjected by Brazilians of African ancestry. I had assumed that white Brazilians would exhibit some antiblack racism, but I was not prepared for the degree to which Brazilians of color would share their worldview. For instance, the following sentiments expressed by Henrique, a forty-three-year-old self-identified *negro,* were typical of those of other dark-skinned Brazilians interviewed. "Blacks marry whites because whites have good hair. [Whites] have good hair, their nose is not ugly [like ours]. Blacks normally have very large lips, like an animal's and people think this is ugly. I am trying to say that black people know that [their features] are ugly and white people also know that blacks are ugly" (Twine 1998: 91).

Negotiating a symbolic terrain in which my body was so disagreeable was difficult and emotionally challenging. And even more disquieting was confronting the fact that some of the Afro-Brazilians I knew assumed that I shared their valorization of whiteness simply because my partner, Jonathan Warren, who accompanied me to the field, was white. Without expressing any concern about the appearance of children I might have in the future, I was repeatedly told by Brazilian friends of color: "Don't worry, your children won't look like you. They will be whiter and have straighter hair and *olhos azuis* (blue eyes)."[2] Thus they projected on to me their desires of *embranquecimento* (whitening).

In retrospect I realize that even though I did not go to Brazil expecting to be a racial "insider" with Brazilians of salient African ancestry, I did assume that we would share some political and ideological affinities, given a similar history of slavery and white supremacy. In particular I erroneously took it for granted that we would have some shared critiques of antiblack racism. Consequently I did not anticipate their denial of their familial connections to African slavery. I was further surprised by the erasure slave ancestors of African descent in the family memories of people only two or three generations removed from slavery.[3] I was shocked when Brazilians of color accused me of being a racist simply for asking questions about racial disparities. I had expected to be treated as a professional researcher and was not prepared for the assumption by Brazilians of color that I was a maid, the illegitimate sister of my white partner, or his whore.

In the midst of negotiating this very unfamiliar and disorienting racial terrain, I decided to consult the *South American Handbook* (1991) in preparation for a trip to northeastern Brazil. Given the routine racism I had already encountered in Brazil, I wondered if this issue would be addressed. It wasn't. While the guidebook provided special suggestions for women and dealt with some of the problems of gender inequality and possible sexual harassment, neither race nor racism were mentioned as issues that could affect travelers of color. This was surprising, given the handbook's claim to being the "complete guide to South America." In view of the intensity of the everyday racism I had been negotiating I wrote a letter to the editor suggesting that they attempt to deal with this issue since they had demonstrated some sensitivity to the way gender could affect the travel experience. In my letter I expressed my concerns as a brown-skinned traveler of color:

> Your handbook lacks any specific hints for the brown traveler who may encounter racism and color prejudice in Brazil. This gap in your introduction results in an implicit assumption that foreign travelers are European or of European descent and thus physically distinct from much of the native South American population in countries such as Brazil. Although I found some benefits to being able to "blend" in with the native population [such as not being robbed since it was assumed that nonwhites don't have as much money as white tourists], I also found that I was subjected to qualitatively different treatment and to racism as compared to my white American partner. I believe that your section entitled "Introduction and Hints" could be expanded and thus made even more useful to the nonwhite traveler, if you included a section on racism and color prejudice. As a cultural anthropologist and traveler, I strongly encourage you to consider adding this section since there are tourists and business people from North America, Asia, and Africa who may be unexpectedly confronted with racism and prejudice if they leave the beaten track.

On January 11, 1994, Mr. Box responded to my letter. His letter reflected a general reluctance to include racism as a subsection in the

"Helpful Hints" section. He claimed that he had no knowledge about racism in South America since he had received no previous letters documenting this phenomenon. He asked for the names of individuals and organizations who could provide him with information about it. Finally, he informed me that they had no intention of renaming the handbook a "guide for white travelers," as I had suggested.

In thinking about the handbook's assumptions of a white traveler and its failure to even briefly acknowledge that race could be an issue, I began to reflect on my training in research methods as a graduate student. The anthropology department at the Berkeley campus of the University of California offered no graduate courses in qualitative research methods,[4] which is evidently typical of anthropology departments in the United States. As Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson have commented,

> It is astonishing but true, that most leading departments of anthropology in the United States provide no formal (and very little informal) training in fieldwork methods—as few as 20 percent of departments, according to one survey. It is also true that most anthropological training programs provide little guidance in, and almost no critical reflection on, the selection of fieldwork sites and the considerations that deem some places but not others as suitable for the role of "the field." (1997: 2)

Thus I turned to the sociology department, which fortunately offered some qualitative methods courses. Though I learned a number of invaluable lessons in these courses, race—let alone the particular racialized dilemmas that I encountered in Brazil—was not addressed.

Eventually I began to recognize that the absence of reflection on race in graduate seminars parallels much of the conventional qualitative methods literature. That is, my graduate course work was neither an aberration nor reflective of the idiosyncrasies of my professor. Rather, it mirrored the general state of thinking about the intersections of race and ethnographic research in U.S. universities. For example, after editing one of the four major journals devoted to qualitative methods, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography,* for eight years, Patricia Adler and Peter Adler analyzed every submission to the journal. Their stated aim was to provide "a picture of the people who are

doing ethnographic work, the kind of work they are doing and what this portends for the next generation of ethnographers and beyond" (1995: 4). In their "demography of ethnography" the Adlers found that between September 1986 and February 1994 only 5 percent of the submissions addressed race and ethnicity. Of those that were accepted for publication, none dealt with how racial ideologies and positions affected research methods. And of the meta-methodological texts published during this period, I was unable to locate any that addressed racial dilemmas.

Contemporary Ethnography is unfortunately not alone in its relative lack of attention to race matters. In Denzin and Lincoln's *Handbook of Qualitative Methods,* a very useful and comprehensive guide to theoretical debates in qualitative research, only two of the thirty-six articles address race or racism explicitly (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). And despite the occasional edited volume devoted to the dimensions of race and ethnicity (Harrison 1991; Stanfield and Dennis 1993), the current volume is the first to focus specifically on the dilemmas generated for antiracist researchers working in a range of disciplines conducting field research and participant observation. After decades of self-reflexivity among ethnographers analyzing the practices of writing and conducting field research, the lack of sustained attention to racialized dilemmas is particularly noteworthy, considering the degree to which other axes of power have been theorized.[5]

In summary, then, the *South American Handbook*'s failure to acknowledge the complex ways in which racial and color hierarchies mediate social interactions (and economic transactions) parallels much of the conventional research methods literature on field research. My research experiences, combined with the relative absence of empirically grounded theoretical discussions of the particular dilemmas I encountered as a U.S. black ethnographer, motivated me to commission this volume on race and research methods.[6] In conceptualizing *Racing Research* I hope that field researchers and ethnographers, even those whose research is not specifically concerned with racial disparities, will consider the significance of race as a methodological issue. My primary objective in conceiving *Racing Research* is to initiate a serious discussion of the potential ethical, emotional, analytical, and methodological dilemmas generated by racial subjectivities, racial ideologies, and racial disparities.

Racial Insiders and Racial Matching

In sociology it has long been recognized that the race of the interviewer may affect the respondents in survey research. For example, in a 1942 study of a thousand blacks in Memphis, Tennessee, Herbert Hyman (1954) reported that the race of the interviewer had dramatic affects on the responses of the interviewees.

> Twenty-one of the twenty-four questions had reliable differences by race of interviewer; the differences were often large, in five cases more than 20 percentage points. Even more impressive than their magnitudes was the innocuous character of several questions showing such effects. For example, differences occurred in the self-reporting of education and of car ownership—both underreported to white interviewers. The direction of *all* the results was such as to present a relatively passive view of Negro aspirations and discontents to the eyes of white interviewers. (Hyman, quoted in Schuman and Converse 1971: 47)

It was not, however, until the charged political context of the 1960s, generated in large measure by post–World War II decolonization and antiracist movements, that findings like those of Hyman crystallized into the methodological rule of thumb of "racial matching." Inspired by the civil rights and black liberation movements, both the racism and overwhelming whiteness of the social scientific community came under intense scrutiny by antiracists inside and outside the academy. In describing their experiences as white researchers during the mid-1960s, Robert Blauner and David Wellman offer a glimpse into the charged political climate that social scientists suddenly had to negotiate in racial and ethnic minority communities:

> As our study progressed, we exhausted our original contacts, and it became more difficult to get interviews. Potential respondents would systematically stand us up. People raised questions about our motives. Some refused to have anything to do with us. Others demanded that we offer something besides money in exchange for their time. We became painfully aware that social researchers were not welcome in Black and brown communities. Many people resented the fact that the University of California had only recently begun active recruitment of Third World students. They complained that they, like everyone else, were paying taxes for the university, yet were virtually denied access to its facilities.
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> Many Blacks saw themselves in a life-and-death struggle with white America. They believed sociologists had taken sides with the enemy and were therefore to be avoided at all costs. There was strong resentment toward the labels which social scientists have attached to racial minorities. People resented being tagged "culturally deprived," "disadvantage," with "matrifocal families." And our respondents knew that this has been primarily the work of sociologists. One thing "Black Power" seemed to mean was freedom to define oneself without interference by sociologists or any other outside group. (Blauner and Wellman 1998 [1973]: 321–22)

Individuals committed to decolonizing and democratizing higher education pointed to these organic criticisms of the academy and developed them into a general critique of cross-racial interviewing and fieldwork. The position of these scholars, most of them black, was that "1) whites are basically incapable of grasping black realities, 2) because of the very nature of their experiences, blacks and whites will approach the subject of race with very different foci of interest" (Wilson 1974: 324). Furthermore, in the words of Penny Rhodes, a white researcher, "black people's mistrust of white people in general will . . . be extended to the white researcher or interviewer, preventing access or, if access is obtained, distorting the quality of communication which ensues" (Rhodes 1994: 548). The overall message, then, was that "minority group scholars" were the best qualified to conduct research in minority communities (Zinn 1979: 210). Or in the words of Blauner and Wellman, "the white sociologist might well eschew focusing on Black and other Third World communities" (1998: 329).

As a methodological ideal "racial matching" was formulated in part in recognition of the everyday realities of black Americans in the United States who had a "distrust of the research enterprise," especially when carried out by racial outsiders (Zinn 1979: 211). But its emergence needs to be appreciated as more than simply a recognition of an empirical reality in which "outsider status can prohibit some sociologists from conducting field research in some minority communities" (1979: 211). It was also invoked as part of a racial justice movement to racially diversify the academy. In other words, "racial matching" was seized upon by those less

concerned with whether white people could study nonwhites than with democratizing the social scientific community by opening it up to scholars of color. Thus, for instance, Blauner and Wellman's primary agenda is not with "improving research methodologies" but with generating a "legitimate methodological need" for justifying the integration of racial and ethnic minorities into the social scientific community:

> Social scientists realize the need for a series of deep and solid ethnographies of Black and Third World communities, and for more penetrating analyses of the cultural dynamics, political movements and other contemporary realities of the oppressed racial groups. Today the best contribution that white scholars could make toward this end is not firsthand research but the facilitation of such studies by people of color. We must open up the graduate schools in every discipline to Black, Chicano, Puerto Rican and other minority people, particularly those with strong ties and loyalties to their ethnic communities. (1998: 329)

Given this political context, the original skeptics of racial matching—such as Robert Merton (1972) who called for both insider and outsider research in communities of color—were construed by some as political reactionaries. The fear appears to have been motivated by a concern that these critiques might undermine the momentum of efforts to racially diversify the academy by removing some of the justification for these efforts. Ironically, in the current political climate of anti-affirmative action in which American Indians, blacks, Chicanos, and Latinos remain underrepresented in proportion to their numbers among social scientists and thus face the challenge of reproducing the next generation of scholars of color, it is antiracist scholars who have begun to reevaluate the wisdom of racial matching, which continues to inform much of the methodological common sense within sociology. As the British sociologist Penny J. Rhodes notes, "closeness of identity and, in particular, shared racial identity is generally presumed to promote effective communication between researcher and subject and, conversely, disparate identity to inhibit it" (1994: 550). In addition to being considered a better foundation for establishing rapport, racial matching is also widely believed to produce a more adept interviewer because, it is argued, "there are dimensions to black experience invisible to the white

interviewer/investigator who possesses neither the language nor the cultural equipment either to elicit or understand the experience" (1994: 549).

One of the limitations of the racial matching model is that race is not the only relevant "social signifier." In the words of Rhodes, "The assumption that 'race' will dominate and will necessarily override other dimensions of differentiation or of affinity is not always warranted" (1994: 552). In the United States, where racial affiliation is such a salient basis for sociopolitical identity, "insiderness" is still constituted by other factors which may render race of secondary consequence. Thus, the meanings and impact of racial difference are complicated by age, class, accent, education, national origins, region, as well as sexuality. In a paper on insider research, John Aguilar analyzes the arguments on both sides of the issue. He argues that that "all sociocultural systems are complex. Many societies are fragmented by class, regional, urban-rural, and ideology related affiliative differences and all cultures are characterized by internal variation. . . . Despite this, the extreme arguments both for and against insider research rest on an implicit model that characterizes all researchers as either absolutely inside or outside homogeneous sociocultural style" (1981: 25).

Like urban anthropologists, sociologists have also critically examined the foundational assumptions of the "insider" perspective. For example, William Julius Wilson, a U.S. black sociologist, critiqued the arguments made by black sociologists for a "black" insider perspective (1974). Wilson argued that although "an individual scientist's unique experiences and orientations cannot be substituted for knowledge in the context of validation, they may play an important role in inventing and postulating hypotheses in the context of discovery."

> But there is no factual evidence to suggest that a sociologist has to be black to adequately describe and explain the experience of blacks. . . . Moreover, although the contrary is sometimes assumed, the black experience is not uniform. Despite the fact that all blacks may have been victimized by racist behavior, at one time or another, the black experience may nevertheless vary by social class, region of the country and age. Indeed some middle-class black sociologists may have experiences closer to that of middle-class white sociologists than to those of lower class blacks. (1974: 326)

Another criticism of racial insiderness is that researchers who belong to the same ethnic or racial groups as their interviewees evaluate respondents on the basis of conventional social criteria including prestige, white skin, high incomes, and education. Aída Hurtado, a Latina researcher, draws upon the interviewer evaluations of working-class Americans of Mexican descent who are bilingual in Spanish and English to challenge racial and color matching common sense. Hurtado reminds us that:

> Language alone is not what distinguishes the Mexican-descent population in this country. The population is a product of the racial commingling of native Mexican Indians, blacks and various European groups. This mixture has produced a range of phenotypes—fair-skinned, European-looking individuals as well as dark-skinned, Indian-looking people. This study examined two aspects of the respondents' phenotype—skin color and facial features.
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> The potential relationship between language and phenotype is especially important for national surveys in the United States. Even bilingual, ethnically matched interviewers may hold different performance expectations for respondents who speak a language other than English and do not look European. (1994: 80)

Thus, Hurtado observes that "whether the respondents speak English or Spanish and how Anglicized their facial features are "affect how the *interviewer* evaluates the respondent." That is, Latino interviewers evaluate Latino respondents on the basis of phenotype and status expectations (Hurtado 1994. Emphasis in original).

In this volume, Charles Gallagher discusses how he had initially assumed that his insider racial status as a "white" was sufficient to establish rapport with other whites. He had not considered how his social characteristics, such as being a university researcher, and his presumed ethnicity and class would affect his rapport with white respondents. In "White Like Me? Methods, Manipulation, and the Meaning of Whiteness," Charles Gallagher cautions white scholars to carefully examine the assumptions they bring to their research with other whites. Gallagher reminds us that "'Being white,' like being a member in any social group, has a host of contradictory, symbolic, and situationally specific meanings." He writes, "I saw myself, at least in retrospect, as unburdened by my color because whiteness was the focus of my study, because I am white, and because I would be interviewing other whites about the meaning they attach to their race." By providing an analysis of his racialized assumptions, Gallagher responds to earlier critiques of the "insider" perspective. Like Ruth Frankenberg (1993) and several contributors to this volume (see chapters by Blee, Kenny, and Warren in this volume) he nuances the practice of white-on-white qualitative research.

Josephine Beoku-Betts, a West African[7] conducting research in the United States, analyzes the contradictions for racial insiders conducting cross-national research. Beoku-Betts's research focused on U.S. black women in the Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia. While she claimed "insider status" on the basis of her African heritage, she notes that "my relationship as an insider was based on a process of negotiation rather than granted immediately on the basis of ascribed status" (1994: 417). Her social characteristics—such as a British accent, African origins, single marital status, and professional status as a university researcher—generated particular forms of social distance that she had to mediate despite her "racial insiderness."

> In my research I found that while I shared "insider status" with my research participants in ways similar to other black scholars conducting research in communities with which they had shared racial membership, that status was not enough to preclude other challenges I faced based on my nationality, gender, profession, and status as an unmarried woman. I also found my African identity both an advantage and a disadvantage in that it held a different meaning in different communities, on the basis of the extent of their knowledge and interest in Africa. (1994: 414)

Betty Lou Valentine, a U.S. black anthropologist, conducted research with her white partner, Charles Valentine, also an anthropologist, in a poor and predominantly black community in the northeastern United States three decades ago. As a university-educated black woman working as part of a married interracial research team, Betty Lou Valentine did not have automatic access to and rapport with other blacks in the community. However, she ultimately "succeeded well in spite of these barriers." In fact, eventually both of them became "insiders" by living under the same material conditions of poverty as their informants and participating in community activities, thus demonstrating

their ethical allegiance to the community. Their analysis of how they mediated and negotiated the shift from "outsider" to "insider" status in a predominantly black urban community further complicates ideas of insiderness implicit in the racial matching model. For Betty Lou Valentine, her race did not grant her automatic insider status, nor did Charles Valentine's whiteness prove an insurmountable barrier to insiderness. While his race was obviously a disadvantage in terms of making inroads among residents who embraced black nationalist and separatist aims, his ethical position and vulnerabilities as a poor resident of this community enabled him to reposition himself as an insider despite his ascribed racial status.

Other critics of racial matching have noted that insiderness generates its own particular barriers. For example, insiders are expected to conform to cultural norms that can restrict them as researchers. Elisa Facio conducted research among Mexican-American/Chicana elderly women in northern California as a graduate student in sociology. In her analysis of the dilemmas she encountered, she describes how the traditional gender norms in the Mexican-American community restricted her access to men. As an insider in the Chicano community, Facio's "interactions were limited to the women . . . the age dynamic allowed for my greeting of men, but gender limited the types of conversations between us. On several occasions when I did attempt to 'challenge tradition,' the women expressed their disapproval" (1993: 85). In addition, she was expected to conform to a gendered division of labor and to engage in gender-prescribed activities.

Drawing from her research experiences while interviewing black foster care providers in London, Penny J. Rhodes, a white British researcher, identifies several advantages to being a racial outsider. Inspired by the code of racial pairing, Rhodes employed two Afro-Caribbean research associates from working-class backgrounds to help her conduct her interviews:

> But, even when discussing such sensitive subjects as racism, being white was not always the handicap expected. Many people were prepared to talk openly at length about their experiences and opinions and several confided that they would not have a similar discussion with another black person. People treated me to information which they would have assumed was the taken-for-granted knowledge of an insider. As one woman in her twenties explained: "I wouldn't have had a talk like this with another black person. I can discuss these sorts of things more easily with you. With a black person, you would just take it for granted." In these discussions, I adopted the equivalent of a pupil role with the informant a teacher. People spoke to me as a representative of white people. . . . In these encounters [they] were speaking as a black person to a white person: the significance of skin color became paramount, but as a stimulant rather than a block to communication. . . . The following comment, for example, was from a woman in her sixties: "A white person wouldn't know a black person's ways or understand a black family properly because *you* have been brought up differently." (1994: 552. Emphasis in original)

Realizing that racial outsiderness may have its own advantages and that insiderness may simply create a different set of pluses and minuses, many have argued—echoing Robert Merton from the early seventies[8]—that it is optimal to have both racial insiders and outsiders conducting research because they reveal different—not better—kinds of knowledge. In his evaluation of the differences between being a racial insider or outsider in two different field sites—the Lahu Hill tribes of Northern Thailand, and his native community of blacks in Denver, Colorado—Delmos Jones, a U.S. black anthropologist, concludes that "the whole value of the insider researcher is not that his data or insights into the actual social situation are better—but that they are *different*. Most of the few black anthropologists operating in this country are looking for something new, questioning old assumptions about social processes, developing new ones, and exploding old myths, and in the process developing new ones" (1982: 478. Emphasis in original).

Ann Phoenix, a black British feminist researcher, has also critiqued commonsense notions of "colour" matching. She argues that "'race' and gender positions, and hence the power positions they entail, enter into the interview situation, but they do not do so in any unitary or essential way. As a result the impact of 'race' and gender within particular pieces of research cannot be easily predicted. Prescriptions for matching the 'race' and/or gender of interviewers and respondents are too simplistic" (1994: 49).

> The argument that black interviewers are best used for black interviewees is sometimes rooted in a realist epistemology, the central tenet of which is that there is a unitary truth about respondents and their

> lives which interviewers need to obtain. Black interviewers are considered to "blend in" better with black interviewees and thus to be more likely than white interviewers to get data which is "good" because it captures the "truth." Some studies have found that the colour of the interviewer does have an impact on the data collected. . . . The complexity of this impact, however, makes it difficult to be clear whether the matching of interviewees with interviewers on particular characteristics will produce "better" or "richer" data than not matching. If different types of accounts about "race" and racism are produced with black and with white interviewers this is in itself important data and may be good reason for using interviewers of both colours whenever possible since it illustrates the ways in which knowledges are "situated." It is, therefore, not methodologically "better" always to have black interviewers interviewing black interviewees. Politically, this strategy may also lead to marginalization of research on black researchers since it is easy for white researchers to consider that black interviewers can only contribute to research on black informants. In addition, it renders invisible any contributions they make to research which is not only on black samples or on "race." (1994: 66)

These last sentences point to a potential pitfall of racial matching as a practical measure for furthering antiracism. Phoenix suggests that racial matching may contribute to the marginalization of black scholars relegated by the logic of racial matching to studying only those of the same race. Or, as Penny Rhodes, another British researcher, puts it, "as a long term strategy for gaining access to the research establishment, [racial matching] risks promoting the very marginalization and devaluation of black people and their concerns which it seeks to redress" (1994: 557).

Racial Standpoints?

One of the central premises of the racial matching model is that racial subordinates have a particular worldview. It is presumed, for instance, that racial subalterns better understand racial prejudice and discrimination, are less racist, and identify more closely with members of their presumed racial group. This is precisely why proponents of color

matching have hypothesized "that a) a black interviewer would be more likely to share the experience of racial prejudice and discrimination with a black informant who would, therefore, feel more comfortable discussing these issues than with a white person; b) black people's mistrust of white people in general would be extended to a white interviewer and inhibit effective communication; c) a white interviewer would be [more] likely to conduct an interview and interpret the data in a prejudiced manner" (Rhodes 1994: 550).

However, racial subalterns do not automatically better understand racism nor do they necessarily identify more closely with members of their racial group because, as Philomena Essed has argued, people have "multiple identifications" (Essed 1994). Racial subordination does not mechanistically generate a critical stance vis-à-vis racism any more than colonialism created anticolonial subjectivities (Fanon 1967; Memmi 1991). This explains in part why Sylvia Tamale, a black Ugandan feminist with a degree from Harvard, did not understand how everyday racism operated even though she had lived in the United States for several years. And so when she began her study of racism in the United States, she compared herself to the white American journalist John Howard Griffin who had conducted research on racism in 1959.

> Although my skin pigmentation was naturally black, in many ways, I shared Griffin's anxieties, naiveté and discoveries in the course of my field research. Like him, I was consciously "living" racism first hand for the first time. Prior to the study, my outside status had "protected" me from a lot of pain and degradation that comes with a heightened sensitivity to racism. (1996: 479)

Her racial position as a black African living in the United States had not led her to acquire a particular understanding of the processes of racism naturally. Rather, she obtained these insights only through a careful study of the matter—insights which may appear commonsensical on the surface, but which in reality are lessons that most United States blacks are carefully taught in the U.S. black community (Essed 1991; Feagin and Sikes 1994).

In a different national context Brazil also illustrates epistemologies that do not necessarily correspond to a different location in the nexus of power. Although Brazilians are materially and symbolically marginalized

on account of their ancestry phenotype, Brazilians of salient African descent do not typically possess a different political standpoint from whites when questioned about definitions of racism, and racial disparities (Twine 1998). Thus, rather than mistrusting a white researcher, racial subalterns in Brazil may be more likely to identify with them. My experiences suggest that some Brazilians of color do not necessarily feel more comfortable discussing the topic of race and racism with those who resemble them racially. Rather, this particular topic generates discomfort regardless of the racial origins or phenotype of the interviewer. Moreover, prestige hierarchies and the valorization of whiteness resulted in some Brazilians of color preferring to be interviewed by my white research partner.

We see, then, that the utility of racial matching is contingent on the subordinate person having acquired a particular subjectivity. It is premised on racial subalterns considering their skin folk their kin folk and being more distrustful of members of the racially dominant group. In my experience, U.S. scholars typically interpret this as an inevitable by-product of racism. That is, they presume that different ideological positions are attached to one's location in racial hierarchies. It should be evident, however, that when racial subalterns do not possess a developed critique of racism or idealize the racially privileged group, race matching may not be an efficacious methodological strategy.

Researching Racial Fields

In the 1960s Choong Soon Kim, who was born and raised in Korea, went to rural Tennessee and Mississippi to conduct field research among blacks, American Indians, and whites. One of Kim's principal predicaments as an Asian researcher involved the social scripts attached to his phenotype:

> In the field, I experienced a constant pressure to conform to the role expected of an Asian. Almost all of the southerners I studied during my fieldwork expected me to behave as a foreigner. I do not think they had consciously constructed a model of what an Asian should be, but they had enough explicit notions to constitute a stereotype. For example, an Asian should have yellowish skin and straight black hair, be short and stocky, and wear eye glasses. He must say "thank you" more than three times for every simple thing or event, even if it is not deserving of so much appreciation. He ought to be polite and humble in his manner. But more than anything else, he should not speak English fluently. (1977: 12–14)

Kim's experiences illustrate how researchers must often navigate racialized fields in particular local and national contexts. They frequently have to negotiate the way their bodies are racialized and the meanings attached to these racializations. The racializations Kim encountered seemed to affect whether he was perceived as "foreign" (i.e., his national identity) and the behavioral etiquette to which he was expected to conform, which in turn affected his access or degree of immersion in his research community.

Like Kim, my body was racialized within a particular national field. In Brazil I was rarely considered an "authentic" North American from the United States but rather a "naturalized" American or a Brazilian attempting to pass as a North American. My experiences were not unlike those described by Faye Harrison, a light-skinned black American who conducted research in Jamaica in the 1970s. She observes:

> My social status as a light colored Afro-American intellectual was imbued with a great deal of ambiguity. . . . Initially, Oceanview folk perceived me to be almost anything other than my own self-conception, i.e. a Black social scientist with a strong identification with oppressed Black people. While the majority of Oceanview people saw in me a middle-class "brown" woman, some presumed and insisted that the "American doctor doing research" was socially—if not genealogically—"white." For Jamaicans who have never been to the U.S. and who have exposure to the stereotypes through the media and through Jamaican emigrants' self-tailored tales of success as "foreign," the symbol "American" often means affluent White U.S. citizens. Black Americans encountered in Jamaica are frequently assumed to be West Indian immigrants with American accents. . . . In a society where color variations are keenly perceived and endowed with social meaning, light skin is often construed to be a salient mark of class privilege and social distance from the Black masses. The stereotypic brown woman would not be expected to undertake research that would

> reflect the interests of ghetto people. It would be more plausible for her to seek information which could be used for purposes of social control, containment and manipulation. (1991: 98–99)

Faye Harrison's description of Jamaica in the late 1970s mirrors some aspects of my research experiences in Brazil in the 1990s as a U.S. black. In the community in which I worked local residents (particularly working-class people who lacked the resources to travel to the United States) racialized the United States as a white nation and were reluctant to accept my claims that I was a U.S. native. They assumed I was of Brazilian parentage and thus simply "passing" as a North American. This often gave me access to a particular type of Brazilian experience reserved for "local" *brasileiras,* which facilitated some aspects of my research. However, since I was assumed to be a Brazilian native, or "insider," particularly among working-class people in rural areas, I was rarely perceived to be a credible researcher.

Harrison's observations also underscore the fact that racialized fields are neither stable nor uniform. Researchers who work in non-native settings must often manage differences in the constitution of ethnic and racial boundaries, color hierarchies, categories, and meanings. For example, just as a U.S. white may not be regarded as white in New Zealand (see Warren and Twine 1997), Harrison, a U.S. black, was not considered black in Jamaica. Instead, some labeled her "'white' or 'brown'—or sometimes 'red'— . . . representative of 'Babylon,' the Rastafarian designation for Black Jamaicans' domestic and foreign oppressors." Others, "having internalized the 'colonial mentality,'" considered her a "nice brown woman" (Harrison 1991: 99).

The effects of not being taken seriously as a researcher became more apparent to me when I began conducting research in central England in 1995. Here my Americanness was not only accepted without suspicion, but as a U.S. black I was often perceived to be quintessentially American. I was rarely quizzed about my origins and my accent was taken as proof of my Americanness. Furthermore, a certain authority and chicness attached itself to me as a representative of the U.S. black middle class. The local calculus of color and race may thus determine which segments of the community the researcher can easily access, and the normative social roles and social scripts to which s/he is expected to conform.

Moreover, despite the salient cultural differences between me and the Caribbean immigrants (such as my inability to speak patois, understand local humor, or cook West Indian food), in British professional circles and community events the local people typically treated me as a transatlantic cousin who had returned home. They considered me as part of a larger pan-African community linked to them through a common history of slavery and struggle against antiblack racism. In a sense, then, I found in England among the Caribbean immigrants the transnational black community that I had anticipated encountering in Brazil. One can easily imagine how being positioned as a "cousin who is concerned with black liberation" rather than as a "*mulatta* struggling to become white" might have very different implications for the type of data one ultimately collects. Thus, conducting research in Britain illuminated how much the national context can alter one's ascribed racial or ethnic position.

Eroticism and Racism

The erotic dimensions of field research are shaped by geopolitical forces (Michalowski 1996). While lesbian, gay, and queer scholars have advanced analyses of erotic subjectivity in the field (Kulick and Willson 1995; Lewin and Leap 1996), there has been little discussion of how racism affects eroticization. Jonathan Warren and Michael Hanchard analyze this issue with reference to Brazil. As a U.S. black political scientist, Michael Hanchard explores in "Racism, Eroticism, and the Paradoxes of a U.S. Black Researcher in Brazil," how U.S.-Brazil political relations affected the ways he was eroticized as a man of salient African descent. His status as a professional researcher did not make him "immune to such categorization." In fact, it was clear at one party he attended, hosted by a white anthropologist, that he was positioned as an erotic object much as women tend to be reduced to their sexuality in patriarchal societies. Describing his visual experiences at this party, he writes, "Virtually all the artwork on the walls—an assortment of postcards, paintings, and advertisements of romantic and sexual couplings of white women with black men—depicted black men with white women. When linked to the party thrower and the overwhelmingly dark, overwhelmingly male presence at the party and the

sight of the hostess dancing among several of these men. . . . I had the distinct feeling of déjà vu."

Jonathan Warren, a white sociologist, examines another dimension of racialized erotic fields in Brazil. In "Masters in the Field," Warren argues that for white researchers the eroticization of racial categories may be experienced as pleasurable and indeed nonracist. In a context in which whiteness is valorized, white researchers may be exotified and eroticized but in contrast to blacks they are not typically reduced to merely hypersexed objects. Since whiteness is associated with intelligence, prestigious pedigrees, and middle-class positions of authority, this particular form of eroticization may create a symbolically affirming context—unlike the disempowering and negative climate for black men. However, even this radically different erotic and emotional climate can generate its own peculiar methodological pitfalls. Warren contends that because eroticization can affirm white researchers, they may be motivated to misread and thus misrepresent the ways in which racism operates in Brazil.

Racial Discourses

Another dimension of racialized fields which has serious methodological and ethical implications, is racial discourse. Here I am referring to the way people talk about race, their racial vocabularies, racial narratives, and their definitions of racism. In "Doing My Homework: The Autoethnography of a White Teenage Girl," in this volume, Lorraine Delia Kenny discusses the difficulties of doing research in "color-blind" fields such as the white middle-class community on Long Island that she studied. As an ethnographer, who is building upon the work of Ruth Frankenberg, who argues that in such contexts white women aspire to "'not see' race difference despite its continued salience in society and in their own lives" (Frankenberg 1993: 149), she devised "methods for naming the unnamable, marking the unmarked, seeing the invisible, or, more importantly, articulating the meaningfulness of its carefully constructed meaninglessness." Furthermore, Kenny notes that when studying a race-evasive culture such as her childhood home of Long Island one encounters the ethical dilemma of inevitably violating that culture because one is making visible that which people struggle and desire to keep invisible. "In inflammatory terms, the very groundwork

of my study sets me up as a race traitor: if whiteness, or at least middle-class whiteness, maintains its social hegemony through a kind of measured silence and anonymity, . . . an ethnographer of whiteness necessarily seeks to break this code and hence give the lie to white privilege. . . . to articulate that which cannot and should not be said."

In "Masters in the Field," Jonathan Warren suggests that white North American researchers have racialized the discourses of race which Kenny studied. Scholars tend to associate a color- and power-evasive language of race with whites and in particular with middle-class whites. Subsequently, when they encounter this "culture of avoidance" amongst people of color, they may erroneously interpret this as evidence that racism is absent. In a sense, then, they assume a standpoint epistemology, in which different locations within racial hierarchies will result in different perspectives. Thus they do not expect whites, as members of the dominant racial group, to be knowledgeable about race and racism. In contrast, racial subalterns are assumed to possess a sophisticated understanding of racism. When they do not, this is misinterpreted as an absence of racism. Thus it is presumed that if racial inequalities existed, racial subalterns would have a critique of their subordination; they would not have "the privilege" to be able to avoid the issue of race.

In their chapter on conducting transnational research in prisons Kum-Kum Bhavnani and Angela Davis raise the issue of researching racism in national contexts, including Cuba and the Netherlands, in which racism is either avoided (not named) or has very different meanings. In the United States, they write, "racism is often understood to refer to institutional and individual discrimination against black, Latino, Native American, and Asian-American people. In Europe, *racism* is viewed as synonymous with *xenophobia*. Thus in the Netherlands . . . responses to our questions about racism tended to focus on attitudes toward foreigners, rather than on racism by white Dutch people against non white Dutch citizens."

In 1992, I encountered the problem that Bhavnani and Davis refer to when I had difficulties generating discussions about racial disparities in Brazil for a number of reasons: it was a taboo subject, since "seeing racism meant being racist" (Frankenberg 1993: 147); local definitions of racism were narrow compared to those in the United States (Twine 1996, 1998); and most residents imagined their community as nonracist. The advantage of researching race in such a context is that there

is much less censorship because it is assumed that racism is not really an issue. However, it can also become virtually impossible to engage in sustained discussions of racism because people either do not possess the vocabulary for talking about white supremacy or have not given racism their attention because they do not consider it to be a serious problem.

Aesthetics and Ethics

Another aspect of conducting research in racialized terrains involves the issue of representations, or "writing culture." In the 1980s several groundbreaking books were published, including James Clifford and George Marcus's *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography,* which initiated a postmodern discussion of ethnographic authority and representations (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Abu-Lughod 1991). However, as Deborah D'Amico-Samuels correctly points out, one of the noted weaknesses of these studies is their failure to address race:

> Absences in the reflexive and critical ethnography discourse . . . are [difficult] to explain. One wonders, for example, why Gwaltney's *Drylongso* (1980: 81) is not considered among the new forms of ethnography discussed in *Writing Culture.* It includes many of the elements of the ethnographies which are discussed—experimental form and method, reflexivity on the part of the ethnographer, multiple authorship, and the flavor of fieldwork dialogue and experience. Did Clifford and Marcus not know of this book, and if not, why? The exclusion of Gwaltney's book would seem to signal either the peripheralization of African-American scholarship and the issues of race in the discourse of reflexive anthropology/critical ethnography, or a judgment that consideration of the issues Gwaltney raises would not contribute to the discussion of writing culture, or both. What underscores each of these possibilities, I believe, is a reluctance to deal with the effects of race on fieldwork and the production of ethnographic texts. (1991: 78)

Race, of course, greatly affects one's authority to make certain knowledge claims. There is little question that one can make certain ar-

guments with more credibility depending on the race of the researchers and their subjects. For example, Mitchell Duneier's nonracist portrayal of homeless men (Duneier 1999) probably carries more credibility and legitimacy—at least in certain circles—because he is a white man. In "Racism, Eroticism, and the Paradoxes of a U.S. Black Researcher in Brazil," in this volume, Michael Hanchard raises a related issue of racial authority and scientific objectivity. Describing the initial responses to his research topic of some of his white colleagues and mentors at Princeton University, he notes that when white researchers study white-controlled institutions and movements, their research is not perceived as "biased." However, when he chose to study a black movement in another national context, concerns were raised about his topic being too "narrow" and possibly biased.

In addition to the question of authority, the issue of representation seems to be a particularly agonizing and complicated one for those researching communities vulnerable due to racial and ethnic inequalities. A dilemma that often emerges is, how does one "realistically" represent racially subordinate communities without conforming to idealized racial tropes of the sort Alastair Bonnett (1996) documented in his analysis of antiracist discussions of race in Britain and the United States?

> Anti-racists have often placed a myth of whiteness at the center of their discourse. This myth views "being white" as an immutable condition with clear and distinct moral attributes. These attributes often include being racist; not experiencing racism; being an oppressor; not experiencing oppression; silencing; not being silenced. People of colour are defined via their relation to this myth. They are defined, then, as "non-whites"; as people whose identity is formed through their resistance to others' oppressive agency." (1996: 105)

In fact, in Bonnett's opinion it would seem that "the romantic stereotype of the eternally resisting, victimised 'black community' is required to be further strengthened in order to create a suitable location for escapees from 'whiteness'" (1996: 105).

In my own work in Brazil I have encountered some criticism, I believe, because I have not reproduced idealized representations of the African-descent community (includes people who self-identify as black, brown, and white) in Brazil. In the Brazilian community I studied, most

racial subalterns were not actively challenging racism. In fact many were quite complicit with white supremacy. But such a message, of course, violates romanticized imaginings of resistance.

José Limón describes well the dilemmas and challenges faced by scholars who portray racial subordinates as blemished. In "Notes of a Native Anthropologist," Limón discusses the possible consequences of his departure from the more romantic representations of "the lower-class mexicano world of popular dancing" that were composed by his predecessor Américo Paredes:

> Yet this move in the direction of the unheroic immediately plunges me into a serious contradiction: as I stake out this ground, I am obligated to speak fully about the *mexicano* world, to articulate not only its concerns with dancing but also its violence, its exaggerated masculinity, and its toll on women—all of which representations potentially place me in an uncomfortable relationship with a history of denigrative "Mexican" stereotypes often used to validate the mistreatment of these, my people. Beyond the purely personal level, this potential relationship is also discomforting in political-intellectual terms, and it poses a contradiction within my work. First, I myself have written critically about such stereotyping (1973), and second, such a position runs counter to a deeper indebtedness to my precursor. That is, while I do not think it possible now, in the seventies and eighties, to render "heroic" worlds, nonetheless I wish to speak of the critical politics possible in the world of El Cielo Azul, just as Parades did for the world of Gregorio Cortez. (1991: 129)

While speaking from different racialized positions, Philippe Bourgois, a white ethnographer of a community marginalized along the axes of race and class, wrestled with the same issue. In "Violating Apartheid in the United States," in this volume, he notes that he "worried . . . that the life stories and events presented in [his] book would be misread as negative stereotypes of Puerto Ricans, or as a hostile portrait of the poor." He observes that this "fear of succumbing to a pornography of violence that reinforces popular racist stereotypes" had created an "imperative to sanitize the vulnerable [that] is particularly strong in the United States because of the survival-of-the-fittest, blame-the-victim theories of individual action that dominate popular 'common sense.'"

Bourgois struggled over these issues for years but ultimately decided that "countering traditional, moralistic biases and middle-class hostility toward the poor should not come at the cost of sanitizing the suffering and destruction that exists on inner-city streets. Out of righteous or a 'politically sensitive' fear of giving the poor a bad image, I refuse to ignore or minimize the social misery I witnessed, because that would make me complicit with oppression." One of his strategies to mitigate a neoconservative reading of his ethnography was to develop "the historical and political economy context first and [portray] them as victims of social structural oppression and interpersonal abuse before subsequently confronting the reader in later chapters with the fuller horrors of these very characters as perpetrators of violence and abuse against their own loved ones and against their immediate community."

As an ethnic insider, Naheed Islam also grappled with issues similar to those of Bourgois. As she describes it in "Research as an Act of Betrayal," in this volume, she struggled with whether to document the intense antiblack hostilities she found in the Bangladeshi immigrant community in Los Angeles. Her concern, however, was less that it would not conform to a heroic, idealized image of the Bangladeshi community but rather that it would undermine their credibility as "victims" of racism as well as her place in that community. Interestingly, for Islam the pressure to produce this image sprang not from the academic community—as seemed to be the case with Bourgois, whose Puerto Rican informants agreed with his portrayal—but from the Bangladeshi interviewees:

> Some wished to present an idealized model minority image of the community that necessitated severing any relationship to blacks and Latinos. As a researcher parts of the community expected me to censor and skew my presentation to meet these interests. One interviewee who was making racist jokes at a social event found me unresponsive and gathered that I did not share his views. He then turned to me and said, "I know, I know, you are gathering data. You are going to say we are racist. But you don't need to write about what we think of them [blacks]. Focus on what we are going through. That is what your focus should be on. Focus on us." He insisted that I focus on his experiences of racism and omit his own racism toward other groups.

Islam ultimately decided, like Bourgois, that it was best not only as a social scientist but also as one committed to racial justice to expose the racism she had encountered. But, unlike Bourgois, the risks were different. Bourgois was forced to deal with being positioned as a "racist." Islam, on the other hand, chanced "being viewed as a traitor to my ethnic community." Thus her dilemma paralleled that of many of the contributors to this volume who focus on whiteness, in that their decision to privilege their commitment to antiracism and their refusal to be silent about racist discourses led them to be positioned as "race traitors."

Islam's dilemmas illuminate another dimension that racism brings to the social scientific research process for researchers concerned with racial justice. In their essays several white contributors address the issue of complicity with the political agendas of the research communities in which they worked. Kathleen Blee, Philippe Bourgois, and Mitch Duneier, for example, raise the issue of how one's research may be employed by the communities one is studying.

In "Race and Peeing on Sixth Avenue," in this volume, Mitch Duneier discusses his research on black unhoused street vendors in New York City. He suggests that some of the men with whom he worked tolerated his presence because it allowed them to participate in a project that could potentially present a more humane representation of them. Their investment in Duneier's research can be understood in the context of racist and class-biased portrayals of the working poor and unhoused black men in particular. Duneier decided to publish their real names in his book *Sidewalk* (1999) because he wanted other social scientists to be able to verify what he had found. In contrast to Duneier, Kathleen Blee had to find a way to counter the strategic deployment of her published research by white racist activists who wanted to use her work to propagate and publicize themselves and their political organizations. As she describes it in "White on White," she ultimately decided not to publish the names of the people she interviewed, to undermine the efforts of racist activists to publicize themselves through her research.

Conclusion

I commissioned the chapters in this volume in order to advance theoretical debates in qualitative research methods scholarship about the

particular dilemmas racial ideologies and racialized fields generate for researchers. These dilemmas have theoretical implications for the way knowledge about racial and social inequality is produced. Furthermore, I wanted to integrate the concerns of research methodologists and critical race theorists in a single book. The chapters in this volume provide empirical examples of some of the issues that field researchers confront as antiracists. Nonetheless, *Racing Research* is not an exhaustive analysis of the methodological issues in field research. Rather, my aim is to inspire and initiate renewed interdisciplinary dialogue among researchers, to explore how the fields in which they operate are "raced" in ways that are neither unitary nor predictable.

All the contributors to this volume address the process of conducting research in racialized fields of power specifically as antiracists. A recurring theme in this volume is the dilemmas generated when conducting qualitative research in the context of racial disparity and racial oppression. The instability and unnaturalness of "race" and the uneven meanings of racism can have methodological consequences for qualitative researchers even when their research is not primarily focused on the issues of race or racism. Researchers committed to an antiracist agenda may find they are being positioned as "traitors" to their communities on account of their research.

The contributors to this volume work in the fields of African-American Studies/Black Studies, Asian American Studies, Cultural Studies, Latin American Studies, Womens' Studies, Philosophy, Political Science, and Sociology. It is my hope that by providing a template of some of the methodological dilemmas faced by antiracist researchers, this volume will inspire other researchers to consider the local matrices of racial ideologies, racial discourses, and racialized exclusions that ground their particular research projects. I would like to thank Jonathan Warren for his theoretical insights and careful, engaged critique of this chapter. His engagement with my work has left its mark on this analysis.

NOTES

1. Unfortunately David Hellwig's edited volume (*African-American Reflections on Brazil's Racial Paradise* [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992]) was published after I completed my first period of field research.
2. Unpublished field notes, March 1992.

3. See my chapter, "White Inflation and Willful Forgetting," in *Racism in a Racial Democracy: The Maintenance of White Supremacy in Brazil* (Twine 1998).

4. In 1991 I was a member of the first class to enroll in a Visual Anthropology course taught by Jack Potter which was the only qualitative research methods course offered to nonarchaeologists.

5. Thanks to the theoretical innovations by feminist, gay/lesbian, and queer theorists, there is a developed body of literature on gender, sexuality, and erotic subjectivity. For examples, see Golde 1970; Warren 1988; Whitehead and Conaway 1986; Maynard and Purvis 1994; Kulick and Willson 1995; Wolf 1996; Lewin and Leap 1996.

6. In conceptualizing and carrying through this project I benefited greatly from my conversations with Stephen Small and Jonathan Warren.

7. She does not provide any information about her specific national origins but does indicate that she was educated in England.

8. Merton concluded that it is optimal to have the perspectives of both racial insiders and outsiders. In his words: "Insiders and outsiders in the domain of knowledge, unite. You have nothing to lose but your claims. You have a world of understanding to win" (1972: 44).

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