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Contradictions in Native Ethnography

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Dina Barajas
2017 AIRA Conference Abstract
Paper: “Contradictions in Native Ethnography”

Key words: native ethnography, Mexican-American, Aztec dance, curanderismo, Indigenous epistemology, ontology and research paradigms

Abstract:

This essay discusses my positionality as an insider/outsider researcher, the tense/contradictory experiences I had with my native community, and my efforts to resolve these matters with Indigenous ethics and holistic view of community, while conducting confidential participant observations of ceremonies performed by mestizo (Mexican American/Indigenous) danzantes Aztecas (Aztec dancers) and promotoras tradicionales—practitioners of curanderismo (Mesoamerican folk medicine) and natural healing, who are located in New Mexico/Mexico. I am a danzante and promotora tradicional who is a part of this ceremonial community. This paper argues that tensions/contradictions will arise between an insider researcher and members of their native community which they are conducting research with, despite contentions that maintain that research conducted by insiders enables easier access to information and permits a smoother research processes (Paredes, 1993). These conflicting situations can make the insider feel like an outsider, but, can also remind them of the importance of making their obligations toward their Indigenous elders/ceremonial community a primary priority. This work discusses these tense/contradictory experiences in the context of the insider/outsider dichotomy as discussed by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Américo Paredes, and Karen Mary Davalos. This essay underscores my value in and implementation of Indigenous research paradigms such as Lori Lambert’s Spider Web Conceptual Framework, which involves listening to one’s heart, using one’s voice, implementing Indigenous ethics/respect, tribal protocols, and elder knowledge, among other Indigenous perspectives (2017). By incorporating Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and research paradigms, my paper demonstrates that this research is being conducted as a ceremony (Wilson 2008).