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The Circulation of *Chisme* and *Rumor*: Gossip, Evidentiality, and Authority in the Perspective of Latino Labor Migrants in Israel

Cross-culturally, the types of interactions that anthropologists have studied as “gossip” or “rumor” are opposed to types that constitute more authoritative texts. Instead of using participant structures to define such types of interactions, this opposition is used as a means to consider the evidential function of such descriptors. The discussion considers these issues from the perspective of non-Jewish, Latino labor migrants in Israel, whose usage of chisme (“gossip”) versus rumor (“rumor”) maps to in-group and out-group sources. The paper further considers how such frames were used in a short-lived weekly magazine, centered on the ritual chronotope of La Cancha (the soccer field), and also how a denunciation was quashed by producing an authoritative voice that condemned it as “chisme.” [gossip, evidentiality, authority, publicity, voice]

In memory of Michael Rinat, our dad Mike.

A few months after finishing fieldwork, while Internet-chatting with a Colombian friend and informant in Israel, I questioned her about a highly anticipated wedding of two of her close friends. Andrea, who had been a maid of honor, and had worked closely with the group preparing the grand event, exclaimed that the wedding had been “divine,” “truly beautiful,” and then concluded with pleasure, “we worked very hard, but all the *chismosos* ['people who gossip a lot,' m.] left happy.¹ They didn't criticize too much.” I laughed and asked innocently, “which *chismosos*?” “Oh yeah, which *chismosos*?”, she answered sarcastically, “Colombians?????, What a lie!!!!”—thus invoking a stereotype widespread among Latinos in Israel that they love to gossip.² On another occasion, again chatting with Andrea, this time about the big Latino New Year's Eve bash in Eilat, a resort town in southern Israel, I complained explicitly that she had not told me any good *chismes* (“gossip”).³ She answered by telling me a story about a woman who attacked her ex-boyfriend and his new girlfriend in the middle of the party, with more than eighty people watching.

In these two brief examples, it is already possible to see the range of social meanings involved in Latino uses of the word *chisme* and its lexical derivations. This multiplicity of meanings in fact illustrates a variety of issues discussed by scholars interested in texts or actors that are labeled with metapragmatic descriptors like *gossip* and *rumor*. First, there is the sense of telling news that does not appear across authoritative news channels, and that interests a small group, supposedly constituted in face-to-face, interpersonal interactions, and where the limits of the group itself are to some extent at issue in the discursive interaction: am I as Andrea's interlocutor trustworthy enough as a friend, and (ethnographically) knowledgeable enough, to be included as an addressee of an act of transmitting the tale about the New Year's Eve party? As Max Gluckman (1963, 1968) and others famously argued, this is the boundary-marking function of such interactions: outsiders either are not included or they cannot properly participate in gossip sessions. Second, there is the sense of how controlling the spread of stories through the group can actually be related to actors' individual or factional interests: the wedding was such a success that the *chismosos* who might have taken aim at the sponsors' reputation were held at bay, and therefore the sponsors and not their enemies were having their way in the event's discursive aftermath. (Or at least that was what Andrea wanted me to believe.) Such an analysis is associated with anthropologist Robert Paine, who along with others, sought to focus the analysis of gossip on interested action, especially controlling the flow of information.⁴

Finally, more recent anthropological studies of gossip have sought to work out a dialectic between group formation and interested action, without presuming either as an exclusive or necessary telos. Often, this involves describing different levels of boundary-marking through alliance-building: the constitution of allies occurs in what are conceived of as "off-stage" or "private" genres of interaction, where one faction is built up and the opposing side is simultaneously attacked. These sessions often lead up to or influence the "onstage" or "public" interactions, or fix particular interpretations of the latter. Or, in James Scott's version (1985, 1990), the off-stage aspect is the realm of the subjugated resisting their subjugators, and so gossip and rumor are potential "weapons of the weak." In other words, as many have argued (e.g., Besnier in press, Brenneis 1984, Brison 1992, Haviland 1977, Merry 1984), the more private events stand in relation to the more public ones, together producing effective action. Perhaps John Haviland (1977: 90) summarizes this relation best in stating "there is a close parallel between what Zinacantecos find interesting to gossip about and what they find worth fighting about," that is, what matters they might take to some more public and authoritative dispute resolution process.

In fact, although none says it explicitly, gossip seems to be correlated for the most part in these studies with certain kinds of interpersonal genres of conversation, as opposed to broadcast or mass modes of communication.⁵ Given this, this paper follows Susan Gal's argument (2002) in treating the terms *public* and *private* as ideological constructs, whose indexicalities shapes how the public/private dichotomy is re-embedded within sites understood as public or private. Building on earlier work (Irvine & Gal 2000), Gal calls this re-embedding process "fractal recursivity." In this case, the establishing of a relatively public forum for communication in a group, often using broadcast modes of communication, stands in relation to more private forms, often using interpersonal modes. Yet the dichotomy works such that a more comprehensive public forum can be constituted that will recast seemingly public genres as relatively private in comparison; likewise, there are potentially more private or intimate contexts that can be generated as well. This is especially important to remember in the study of a highly marginalized migrant population like Latinos in Israel, who largely lack legal residence and work chiefly in menial jobs. The public forums to which Latinos have access, as in churches or at La Escuelita, will seem relatively private and restricted with respect to, say, major Israeli news media as well as state-centered public institutions. Adults among this non-Jewish population usually do not speak more than jargon Hebrew, which further circumscribes their access to

those public discourses that center Israeli political and social life. I argue that the ideology that Latinos are chismosos is a partial expression of this positionality, and involves a tacit recognition of hegemonic Israeli public forums.

This paper aims to contribute to anthropological work on gossip and rumor by considering more carefully the pragmatics of salient metapragmatic descriptors (see Silverstein 1985), such as the English *gossip* and *rumor*, or, in the case at hand, Spanish *chisme* and *rumor*. Taking such a starting point helps to reposition the insights generated by studies of gossip and rumor, and especially to move beyond the limited definitions used. Generally, the definition of *gossip* used by anthropologists is based on participant structures: gossip is any text transmitted between ratified participants about a discursively nonpresent, in-group other.⁶ In contrast, studies of rumor have generally taken as their focus texts that would seem to have a wider circulation, and go beyond the interests of any one small group (e.g., Allport and Postman 1947, Kapferer 1990, Lienhardt 1975, Shibutani 1966, Stewart and Strathern 2004).⁷ Although the difficulty of such definitional foci has been discussed (see especially Besnier in press: Ch. 1), scholars have not fully considered the indexical qualities of local descriptors like *gossip* and *rumor*, and, possibly as a consequence have paid less attention to analyzing the social processes by which such metapragmatic labels are made to stick.

In other words, current approaches do not consider how actors themselves use such descriptors strategically to characterize the discourse of some competing faction, and how such uses form one aspect of the dialectics of entextualizing information that seems to have no clear author, or whose authority may be doubtful. The categories of gossip and rumor (or local equivalents) are clearly opposed to (institutionalized) genres of interaction which produce authoritative knowledge, potentially but not necessarily with a clear and responsible author or principal. No doubt this is why more public and authoritative discourse so frequently comes up in work on the subject, perhaps most remarkably in the study of the social psychologists Gordon Allport and Leo Postman (1947), who at the end of the Second World War sought to theorize rumor as part of an effort to describe how supposedly demoralizing wartime rumors could be quashed through providing channels of information with "secure standards of evidence." To this end, they supported the use of "rumor clinics," where loyal journalists in conjunction with military offices and social-psychologists began writing newspaper columns to not only discredit false claims, but also to explain the dangers of spreading and trusting unverified information (see also Kapferer 1990, Neubauer 1999). Many scholars have pointed out that gossip and rumor are involved in contesting outcomes, as in this example, but the example also suggests how labeling information with "rumor" (or "gossip") involves establishing an authoritative voice.⁸ Herein lies part of the indexical power of such terms.

These relationalities can be restated as intersections of two orthogonal axes. Just as there seem to be cross-culturally genres of interaction that are characterized by being relatively more private and off-stage in relation to other genres that occur in a more public and on-stage fashion, so there are genres which tend to diffuse responsibility and which thereby can be seen as nonauthoritative in relation to others where a central figure can take responsibility and thus provide authority. Prototypical examples of "gossip" or "rumor" are those which partake in one extreme of both axes, transmitted in more private interactions and construed as having no responsible agent, including cases where the attributed source is not considered trustworthy by the participants. Clearly this is not a necessary correlation. Brison (1992) gives several examples of important actors that use public forums to communicate what they later described as rumors. Celebrity gossip columns also function in this way, bartering on the sense that targeted celebrities supposedly want to exclude certain activities from public knowledge. Conversely, published academic work often contains references to "private communication," thus citing known scholars who lend their authority to the author's statements despite the lack of a published source.

To explore these points further, I will first argue that gossip and rumor descriptors have lexicalized evidential functions; that is, they operate like shifters or denotational indexicals (Jakobson 1971, Silverstein 1992). Besides characterizing and thus framing certain genres of texts, such descriptors index the source of information as a previous moment of communication. This is true both of such descriptors as well as of evidential frames (e.g., English *I hear that* or *it's said that*). Secondly, I argue that, through their use and as a consequence of this evidential value, such descriptors and frames help to project the group that is purportedly circulating the story, and thus contribute to a sense of discursive community.

I will discuss these points by first looking at the differential use of the terms *chisme* and *rumor* among contemporary labor migrants from Latin America in Israel. *Chisme* indicates a source from within the projected group of Latinos, while *rumor* a source from without and by default from the Israeli public.⁹ I will also discuss a short-lived weekly publication that appeared during 2000, whose popularity stemmed from its gossip column, as a means to discuss how the image of chismoso Latinos became a central organizing principle for experiencing groupness. I will then describe how a well-positioned member of the group, attacked by what he considered to be chismes, managed to quell them by using relatively public events where he constituted himself as someone able to judge evidence and speak authoritatively. Finally, in the conclusion, I will discuss more explicitly how this perspectival and processual approach to texts we call gossip or rumor is more in line with recent linguistic anthropological discussions of entextualization (Bauman and Briggs 1990, Silverstein and Urban 1996).

"Escuché un chisme que . . .": The Evidential Function of *chisme* and *rumor*

Descriptors like *gossip* and *rumor* have evidential functions, like reportative or hearsay evidentials. That is, they can index an earlier event where the story was told or the information communicated and the present sender was among prior recipients, and where, in some manner, that prior communication provides a warrant for the present communication.¹⁰ Paul Kockelman, in formulating a general framework of the relation between evidentiality and epistemic modality (or status), describes how such first-order indexicality (source) implicates a second-order indexicality, a commitment to the validity of the conveyed information (see especially 2004: 143).¹¹ That is, where some text is described with *gossip* or *rumor*, or some frame of equivalent function (described below), the implication is that the information conveyed is held as less than authoritative. Kockelman's framework further points out the importance of the grammar of predicates that take complements for signaling such stances, like verbs of speaking, perception, or propositional attitudes. In discourse of course these can function to indicate what Goffman (1979) called "footing."

The linguistic study of evidentials usually focuses on languages which contain morphological paradigms that specifically and differentially code the source of knowledge in a sentence.¹² While not all languages have such morphological paradigms, all languages seem to have means to mark the same or similar categories of source of knowledge. Those languages with evidential paradigm typically oppose knowledge as reported versus nonreported, or directly perceived versus indirectly perceived, or directly perceived versus reported versus inferred.¹³ In languages with no morphological paradigm of evidentiality, like Spanish and English, syntactically complex clauses can produce evidential implicatures.¹⁴ In such languages, frames like verbs of perception and speaking, certain kinds of complement structures, tense and aspect marking, adverbs and modals can interact to generate the inference.

Apart from such morphosyntactic devices and their interactions, metapragmatic descriptors like *chisme* and *rumor*, or parallel terms from other languages, can also have evidential functions. This is because these terms describe the discourse to which they are applied not only in terms of stereotypic features but also in terms of how they circulate. To be sure, they characterize certain genres of text as spreading potentially scandalous, and therefore important, information. But they also index a

source because of their sensitivity to the pattern of circulation. Chismes for example are considered to circulate by word of mouth, “de boca en boca” (from mouth to mouth) as it is commonly expressed, and in particular via channels that cannot be completely relied upon for valid knowledge. If the descriptors index source, their typical use in context can suggest to participants further “chains of discourse relations,” to earlier and later moments in which the message was or will be relayed—“shadow conversations” as Judith Irvine (1996) famously called them. Indeed, as I discuss below in the next section on *Latinos de Hoy*, it is the repeated instantiation of such contextualized uses with either a phenomenally apparent group or an invoked chain of shadow conversations that comes to project a group of speakers, a discursive community, that emerges with, and is maintained by, the shared circulation of gossip and rumor.

To begin, I will look at some ethnographic examples of the use of the descriptor *chisme*. One Colombian, a longtime resident in Israel, had the habit of phoning me to check on things he had heard, and would often embed the proposition in a metapragmatic frame that used *chisme*. On one of many such occasions, *La Escuelita*, an after-school Spanish-language program with which I volunteered, was organizing a tour, and he phoned and said to me (from field notes):

- (1) *Escuché un chisme que hay un paseo.*

I heard a chisme that there's a tour.

Interactionally, he was addressing me as an authority because of my association with *La Escuelita*, someone who could vouch for the validity of the story. Once confirmed, he could then go on to ask me the details of the tour. Note that in this example, the point in calling the knowledge *chisme*—as opposed to telling me with whom he spoke—is that he heard it from a source that could have included any number of intermediate sources, or shadow conversations, prior to reaching his ears. That is, by using the frame *escuché un chisme*, he in fact invokes a group of speakers who (for him) were circulating the story. Because of stereotypes about Latinos getting information wrong, or exaggerating or even intentionally distorting it, he also took the knowledge as uncertain, at least until he talked to me.

The next example is taken from a recording of a staff meeting in *La Escuelita*, during which the teachers met with the pedagogical councilor, Miguel. We were talking about one of the young pupils, Simón, who was clearly not advancing at school, having been in the first grade already three straight years. At one point, Miguel asked what the age of the child was, and Diego Manuel, the director of *La Escuelita*, answered that there was uncertainty, because his mother says that he is six, but the teachers suspect that Simón is actually seven. A long discussion was held where teachers debated with Miguel what the possible problems were with Simón, whether they were behavioral or possibly organic, and where some of the teachers spoke about the mother as also having difficulties, especially in her speech. Later in the discussion, Miguel repeated the boy's age as seven without hedging, and Diego Manuel interrupted him to say:

- (2) *digamos que tiene seis*

let's say that he's six

porque lo otro es un chisme que estamos sacando nosotros

because the other is a chisme which we are starting

Diego Manuel calls the statement that the child is seven a *chisme* because the group gathered at the meeting was the source, and did not constitute an authoritative one. No doubt he also uses the term here because, as a group, the teachers had just bad-mouthed Simón's mother, accusing her of lying and other acts of possibly unsound parenting. Note also that his usage hearkens back to the earlier mention of Simón's age, that is, the moment in which the *chisme* was generated. By stating “a

chisme which we are starting," Diego Manuel also projects the future shadow conversations.

Here, the stereotypic definition of *chisme* as a hostile story on the reputation of a discursively nonpresent, but in-group other is very salient, as is expected according to the literature mentioned in the introduction. But beyond that, like in example (1), the use signals a prior communicative event, where the speaker was a recipient of the message. Because of widespread practices and ideologies about the spread of chismes, the use also projects a group of speakers. Unlike in example (1) though, here the group is phenomenally apparent to all present, namely, the group of teachers at the meeting. In short, the evidential function acts in conjunction with the characterization of the act of circulation to foster a sense of discursive community. Here then is one aspect of the boundary-marking function that Gluckman famously described, emanating from the typical uses of such descriptors.

Latinos can be very sensitive to the proper marking of stories that circulate as chisme. For example, Diego Manuel explained once that he no longer told chismes to one of the other teachers because she would repeat the story and add "Diego Manuel told me." A chismoso who names names is the worst kind. "Se cuenta el milagro pero no el santo" (recount the miracle, but not the saint) is one saying used in Colombia to provide counsel on the pragmatics of chisme-telling.¹⁵ On the other hand, leaving uncertain information unmarked could also cause problems. On one occasion, one particularly well connected Colombian told me that she was upset with some of her sources of information. Whenever she told a story that she had heard secondhand, she made sure to include "el chisme dice" (the chisme says), she explained. Some of her sources were simply repeating stories without such a signal, and causing innocent names to be definitively smeared. Both cases show a sensitivity to the evidential frame.

Examples of uses of *chisme* can be multiplied, but there is an instructive contrast in Latinos' use of the (Spanish) descriptor *rumor*, which parallels the scholarly distinction in the use of English *gossip* and *rumor* noted in the introduction. While *chisme* marks texts as originating from within the group of Latinos, *rumor* marks them as having originated from outside, and, by default and assumption, from Israeli public forums. For example, a Colombian mother asked me about an article that had appeared one day in an Israeli newspaper regarding possible criteria for granting residence to children of undocumented immigrants. Since I was involved with one of the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that advocated on behalf of undocumented labor migrants, the mother explained to me, she wanted to ask me exactly what had been published, and would continue to do so because (from field notes):

- (3) *cuando algo sale en el diario, hay miles de rumores*

when something comes out in the newspaper, there's thousands of rumors

Likewise, Andrea (mentioned at the outset) constantly asked me about a *rumor* that the Israeli state might begin giving residence rights to undocumented immigrants with ten years in the country. When on a second occasion, I told her that I had heard nothing about this, she responded that she heard it from her employers, not from Latinos, and that the *rumores* were persisting. In other words, she considered it more reliable than a story heard from another Latino. Clearly, the story's origin outside of Latino circles, and indeed the attested direct source (her employers), was the reason Andrea consistently used the term *rumor* to refer to it. Later, the originary source of the rumor was made clear to me: a report from a government commission on Israel's immigration policy had come out recommending that this policy be adopted.

These examples point to differences in how the descriptors *chisme* and *rumor* map out the social space of a marginalized immigrant group. When *chisme* is used, a group is projected that speaks about itself, a "we"-group. *Rumor* on the other hand maps onto texts whose source is outside the group, in this case, when "they" the Israelis say things

that interest “us,” or about “us” or might even be addressed to “us.”¹⁶ In both cases, the descriptors’ evidential function contributes to the invocation of a Latino discursive community. To further describe this, I will discuss how such a community became projected briefly through a printed magazine, and especially its gossip column.

Alcachofas: Printed Community Gossip

These evidential functions were also vital to a Latino weekly magazine that appeared in 2000, particularly over a six-month period. The magazine, called *Latinos de Hoy* (*Latinos of Today*) crystallized the perspective of a subgroup of Latinos, whom I have dubbed “Cancha-goers” (see below). Here, I will discuss how the evidential framing of chisme comprised a central device in transposing the prototypically interpersonal and relatively private genre of “chismosear” (to gossip) to a printed and public gossip column in the broadcast mode, and thus to concretize a sense Latinos have of themselves as chismosos. Further, as I will discuss, the voice of the chismoso as framed and constituted by the column produced, for a time, a very different type of “voice from nowhere” than that normally observed in studies of print-mediated publics.

Perspective from *La Cancha* (The Soccer Field)

Latinos de Hoy appeared at the height of the Latino presence in Israel, before the advent of the Immigration Police in 2002, which started a wave of mass deportations and flight of undocumented immigrants.¹⁷ The magazine’s readership, distribution, advertising and local coverage centered on an important Latino weekend institution, generally referred to as *La Cancha*, the soccer field. *La Cancha* constituted the most public space that Latinos could inhabit, where they could perceive themselves in public (Kaviraj 1997: 94–96). Like other public spaces that the Latinos used, *La Cancha* took place at a site usually attended only by working-class groups, and thus underlies their marginality in public space. It was the perspective of the Cancha-goer that was presented in the magazine, and to understand this transposition, it is necessary to consider briefly the happenings at *La Cancha*.

In 2000, *La Cancha* was where many secular Latinos used to, and to some extent still do, gather on Saturdays in a mass carnival of food, soccer, and chatter. During my fieldwork, there were two small-scale *Canchas* where Latinos got together, one on Fridays after work, and another one, significantly larger, on Saturday afternoons. I attended both as often as I could, as these were still centers of secular life. Ostensibly, the reason for meeting on a field was for the men, and sometimes also the women, to play soccer, formerly in well-organized leagues.

Since for many Cancha-goers, Friday nights are spent dancing at a Salsa club until past sunrise, activities do not usually start on Saturdays until mid-afternoon. While people wait for the game to begin, they sit in groups and chat. Often enough there are louder shouts and playful insults, as the assembled try to embarrass each other: who went missing from the Salsa, who danced with whom, who drank too much, who left without paying, who slept with whom. All these are typical topics of the playful teasing and sometimes angry insults among Cancha-goers. Of course, this banter is not only found at *La Cancha*. Wherever I found myself with those that frequented *La Cancha*, or one of the Salsa clubs, the playful teasing was a constant feature, and often turned into competitive verbal play.

La Cancha is not just about soccer and gossip. Over all the banter blares the sound of the latest salsa, merengue, and cumbia from souped-up car stereos or large boom boxes. Some people set up barbecues, either for themselves or to sell hot food. Newcomers to Israel, or their contacts, come to ask around about work. *La Cancha* can also be a site for the making or unmaking of conjugal relations, as well as for other types of social dramas. Indeed, throughout the pages of *Latinos de Hoy* there are reports of large fights that broke out, and more than one editorial mentions the need for Latinos to comport themselves with greater dignity in public, where Israeli society

would see them (below I return to this). At some point, a soccer game does begin, and afterwards the stalwarts settle in for an evening of eating, drinking, and perhaps some more dancing. All of which also drives the chatter.

Such Cancha-life as I witnessed, by all reports, was nothing compared to what went on before the Immigration Police in 2002, who helped drive Latinos underground.¹⁸ Latinos of many backgrounds described to me the festival atmosphere of La Cancha that went on every Saturday, when several hundred would arrive to enjoy their day off.¹⁹ Dozens of booths and tents were set up to sell food, alcohol, and music CDs, many of which advertised in the pages of *Latinos de Hoy*. Major holidays were celebrated there, such as Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day, and national independence days. Several fund-raisers were held there to help out friends in distress. Most important perhaps were the soccer leagues (*los campeonatos*), with ten teams or more squaring off on a regular basis. Apart from this Colombian-dominated Cancha, I also heard described two others where the Ecuadorians and Bolivians were dominant, having their own soccer leagues, food stands, and music. In other words, as a central meeting place for interlocking networks of friends and kin, and where important events occur, La Cancha was and is one of the institutions where chismes are both engendered as well as propagated among a wider, discursively-related group.

Latinos de Hoy: Entextualizing the Perspective from La Cancha

In the midst of these weekly events arrived *Latinos de Hoy*, and by all accounts it had a widespread appeal and impact, achieving notoriety even among those who were not regular Cancha-goers.²⁰ In its pages, Cancha-goers saw their discursive community represented in pictures, stories, and especially through the *alcachofas*, the infamous print form of chisme. Furthermore, La Cancha itself became more than just the congregating ground for reporting on and engaging in the activities found in alcachofas; it was also the principal moment for reading them. In this way, during the six or so months it appeared regularly, Cancha-goers came to instantiate the magazine's reading public on a weekly basis (cf. Laurier and Philo 2007 on early newspapers in English coffee houses). La Cancha served as the substance of discursively linked speakers partially projected by the evidential marking used in alcachofas.

Ostensibly, *Latinos de Hoy* was supposed to provide news from Latin America and Israel. It was started by Andrea along with her then-husband Cecilio, who had been a journalist at a major newspaper from Armenia, Colombia called *La Crónica del Quindío*. According to Andrea, *Latinos de Hoy* was published as a not-for-profit service for Latinos to receive news in Spanish about the country in which they lived or from which they came. Indeed, the first editorial explained that the magazine was supposed to help "keep us informed about the daily events which are making the news in our countries of origin" (Editorial, No. 1, April 1, 2000). Andrea added that, for the editors, the paper also produced a sense of intellectual satisfaction, which they did not receive from their day jobs cleaning houses.²¹ Clearly, they also received no small dose of social power by controlling its contents.

The magazine combined materials written by the editors with content lifted from elsewhere. Much of its thirty odd pages were copied straight from the Internet or from published sources. This included weekly news about Latin America, as well as some news from Israel, a section on Jewish customs, a section on health and beauty, a humor page, and occasionally a recipe or something else of interest. On the other hand, certain sections were actually penned by the editors: the editorial, the section about the Latinos at La Cancha, the gossip column, and the occasional interview with a prominent local figure, like Latin American priests or ambassadors. Besides the written copy, there was also a social page, where Latinos could pay to publish a message and photo about a birthday or other special occasion. No section, though, was as prominent as the one titled "La Cancha," which often included pages of photos and news about celebrations or the soccer league. The relation that Latinos

were supposed to realize with this content was summarized by the slogan of the newspaper: "Para que se entere de lo nuestro" (So you can discover what's ours).

The focus on things Latino, and indeed the perspective from La Cancha, was partially constituted by pictures taken by Cecilio, who was a trained photographer. The pictures took the position of someone who wanders around La Cancha, seeing friends (Figure 1) or else watching a bit of the soccer game, or more generally, watching the celebrations of events like Mothers' Day (Figure 2). In an interesting move, someone named Martha Lucía, a Colombian who sold food at La Cancha, also began to use a picture of her booth as a background for her advertisement; previously she had her advertisement printed with only some basic clipart (Figures 3a & 3b). She thus positioned her booth as it would be seen by the Cancha-goer, and further generalized the visual perspective found in the magazine.

Although the gossip column was only a half-page long, everyone interviewed agreed that it was the most popular section, and had the greatest impact. It was titled *La Alcachofa*, which literally means "The Artichoke," but in Colombia also has a colloquial meaning of someone who speaks vulgarly. (According to Andrea, the column received its name when a friend overheard the editors planning it, and remarked that it was going to be an alcachofa.) Etymologically, the intended sense seems to come from a second widespread meaning of alcachofa: a sprinkler or showerhead. Like such an instrument, the chismoso is someone who will "regar el chisme," spray the chisme everywhere. "*Alcachofa*" became the name of such printed chismes for Cancha-goers. I asked Andrea if there was a model for this gossip column. She answered that in Colombia there are gossip columns, but nothing quite like this one, where the local "farándula" (celebrities) are its subjects; she felt that they were "pioneros" (pioneers) in this kind of reportage. Part of the difference she remembers no doubt has to do with the formal devices with which the chisme is voiced.²²

Anyone still in Israel who remembers the magazine affirmed that it was very chismoso, sometimes stating this with intense disgust. Many admitted that the only reason they bought the magazine was to read the chismes. Andrea herself noted this, stating in an interview that "llego al colmo de que la gente solamente compraba la revista por leer la alcachofa" (it got to the point that people only bought the magazine to read la alcachofa). Although this is probably an exaggeration, it is clear that *La Alcachofa* was what drove sales, which sometimes topped 2000 copies.

One of the most important aspects of the gossip column was that its content was meant to be determined by readers, who according to the prevailing representation supposedly phoned in the good stories anonymously. Yet, as the column gained popularity, and as La Cancha became the central site for the sales and reading of *Latinos de Hoy*, it is clear that anonymous phone calls were not the only channel. Andrea described the eagerness to determine the content of the next week's *La Alcachofa* as she answered my question about how the chismes arrived to their office:

- (4) *casi siempre llamaban*
 they almost always called
o siempre para los fines de semana
 or always towards the weekend
el sábado, que se leía La Alcachofa en La Cancha
 Saturday, when La Alcachofa was read at La Cancha
entonces la gente empezaba a llegar con papelitos
 so people started to come up with little pieces of paper
y se los pasaban a uno
 and they'd pass them to us
es que, "vea, pa' L'Alcachofa entre ocho días"
 like, "look, for next week's La Alcachofa"

la cancha

TORNEO DE SAPO

Ante la gran acogida que ha tenido este entretenimiento del juego del "sapo", Juan Carlos esta preparando el torneo mixto. Las inscripciones están abiertas hasta el 20 de Mayo. Los requisitos son minimos: buen tino y guslarle sapear.



LA CANCHA "TIERRA DE TODOS"

La cancha tradicional sitio de reunión de colombianos y latinoamericanos tiene en su calendario para este 2000 diferentes actividades de integración y hermandad.

Para este mes de Mayo se celebrará el tradicional dia de las madres, danzas, concursos, deportes son entre otras las actividades a realizar.

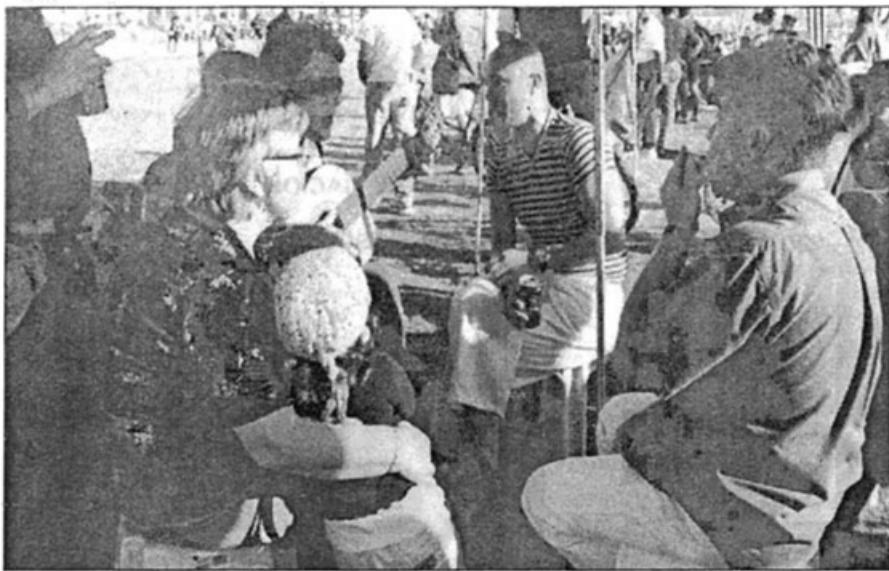


Figure 1
"La Cancha 'Everyone's Land,'" from *Latinos de Hoy*, No. 7, May 20, 2000

The anonymous source was represented both graphically on the page as well as discursively at the beginning of nearly every alcachofa. Graphically, almost every column had a clipart picture of a woman with several telephones in her hands, and a bemused grin on her face (see Figure 4). Besnier (in press: chapter 1) notes that



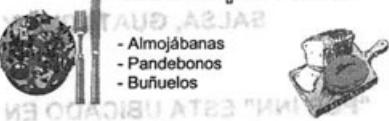
Figure 2
“Celebrating Mother’s Day,” from *Latinos de Hoy*, No. 8, May 27, 2000

REGRESA MARTHA LUCIA A LA CANCHA

Con su deliciosa comida Colombiana

- Bandeja paisa
- Lechona
- Tamales
- Chorizos
- Costilla de cerdo a la braza
- Arepa con queso

Como si fuera poco
todo en panadería



- Almojábanas
- Pandebonos
- Buñuelos

Y una gran variedad en panes

Visítenos para atenderlos como ustedes se lo merecen,
Escuchando la música de ayer, de hoy y de siempre.

AHORA CON SERVICIO A DOMICILIO
TEL. 054-979899 03-5446107

Figure 3a
from *Latinos de Hoy*, Nos. 4–18

REGRESA MARTHA LUCIA A LA CANCHA

Con su deliciosa comida Colombiana



- Bandeja paisa
- Lechona
- Tamales
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TEL. 058-576277 03-5272511

Figure 3b
from *Latinos de Hoy*, Nos. 19–25

gossip as an interactional genre is often gendered as feminine, and this is also the case for Latinos.²³ The alcachofa graphic thus incorporated both the feminine gendering of chisme as well as the image of the stories' circulation in ways that diffused their authorship and responsibility.

In addition to this image, a metapragmatic formula was used that I call an "evidential frame," which partially projected the footing La Alcachofa took up with

LA ALCACHOFA

Se dice por ahí que alguien está esperando una lancha que va para Tiberias, que ya tiene todo comprado, hasta la carpita....Cuando saldrá ese tour?

Rumoran por ahí que en este mes llegara el niño dios de Colombia, cargado de juguetes y que seguramente le traerá su regalito a lentovanito

Existe un refrán que reza: "Todo hijo nace con su pan debajo del brazo"; pues este que viene en camino no tendrá ningún problema ya que la panadería la tendrá en casa.

Se rumora que la secretaria del ex-primer ministro se encuentra en estado interesante, Eh Ave Maria...pues, quien será su papá...?

Cuentan que existe una carpita en la cancha la cual sufre un extraño fenómeno alrededor de las tres de la tarde....(se oscurece) será por una reunión de los de Puerto Teja....?

Parece que un colombiano se embriagó. Salió de la salsa directo a su trabajo, olvidando que no estaba en su casa; Se durmió en la cama de su patrona, la cual a su regreso una sorpresa encontró. Que rico trabajar echado.....! cierto?



Figure 4
Typical Alcachofa column, from *Latinos de Hoy*, No. 5, April 29, 2000

respect to its readers.²⁴ The evidential frame signaled the anonymous source, marking it by convention as a kind of chisme. Its use to syntactically embed the first clause in the alcachofa was the most ubiquitous device for signaling this genre: of 217 stories in the 31 issues, 196 began with such a frame. (All the evidential frames used in alcachofas are listed in Table 1.) These frames were built up around complement-taking predicates, which provided the descriptors. Prominently, verbs of speaking (e.g., *decir*, "to say"), perception (e.g., *escuchar*, "to hear"), propositional attitude (e.g., *saber* "to know") and inference (e.g., *parecer* "to seem") were used. Except for one case, all these frames have either an impersonal third person plural form (e.g., *dicen* "they say"), or else use the pronominal verb form (e.g., *se dice* "it's said") to avoid explicitly denoting the semantic agent or experiencer. That is, no particular individual has to be mentioned as the one involved in transmitting the story. Other grammatical features used to emphasize the anonymous origins of the alcachofa included the non-referential use of the spatial deictic *por ahí* "around there or somewhere" and three common particles, inferential *tal/al parecer* "it seems," interrogative *será* "could it be," and reportative *dizque* "it's said."²⁵ Another device which was supposed to contribute to the anonymity of the alcachofa was the use of nicknames or related, more complex collocations that were familiar to Cancha-goers. Andrea stressed that real names were never used (although see below for some exceptions). These devices signaled that these were anonymous chismes, to which no one person could be held responsible.²⁶ In other words, the use of the evidential frames in particular allowed the editors to claim, in Goffman's terms (1979), that they were merely animators of the alcachofas, not their principals nor their authors. Yet, as Irvine (1996) has argued on related matters, this participant structure was not static, but established dynamically in the interaction with readers. Below I will review this further.

There were other devices, apart from those just mentioned, that helped to transpose to the printed form aspects of the typical Cancha chisme-telling. Briefly, alcachofas also contained a high degree of colloquialisms ("Chilenismos," "Colombianismos," etc.), expressions ("dichos"), sayings ("refranes"), and complex delocutionary labels (derived from greeting rituals, for example). Other general devices for storytelling were common, like the use of rhyme. Together these devices formed a

Table 1
Evidential Frames of Alcachofas

| Speaking | Propositional Attitude | Perception | Inference |
|---|---|---|--|
| <i>dicen que</i> they.say that “they say that” | <i>sabían que [X]?</i> you.PL.know that [X] “do you (PL) know that” | <i>se ha visto (a) X</i> PRN AUX seen “X has been seen” | <i>parece (ser) que</i> seems (to be) that “it seems (to be) that” |
| <i>se dice que</i> PRN say that “it’s said that” | <i>se supo que</i> PRN known that “it was known that” | <i>se escucha que</i> PRN hear that “it’s heard that” | <i>todo parece indicar que</i> everything seems indicate that “everything seems to indicate that” |
| <i>cuentan que</i> they.say that “they say that” | <i>se sospecha que</i> PRN suspect that “it’s suspected that” | | |
| <i>se cuenta que</i> PRN tell that “it’s told that” | | | |
| <i>rumoran que</i> they.rumor that “there’s a rumour that” | | | |
| <i>se rumora que</i> PRN rumor that “it’s rumoured that” | | | |
| <i>se comenta que</i> PRN comment that “it’s stated that” | | | |
| <i>me contaron que</i> to.me they.told that “they told me that” | | | |

familiar register that was meant to resemble the speech of La Cancha, and contrasted significantly with the standard register found in copied materials used for other sections in *Latinos de Hoy* (see also discussion in fn. 22).

Besides the (supposedly) anonymous source, Andrea emphasized that the chismes printed were meant to be “chistosos” (funny) and not nasty ones that constituted personal attack. She recalled that they would not use every story for this reason; as an example she remembered that some people phoned to have another person insulted explicitly, and that they would say things that were “muy fuertes” (too strong). For her, the goal was to publish chismes that everyone was talking about anyway, and would not actually damage reputations. In fact, the first two Alcachofa columns included the subtitle “chismecitos” (little chismes), presumably to emphasize their benign nature (see also example [9] below).²⁷ This laughing tone was represented in one alcachofa that was supposed to sound like a Chilean was writing it.²⁸

- (5) *No es que me gusta el chisme, lo que pasa es que me entretiene ja ja ja cachay que sí.*
 It's not that I like gossip, it's just that it amuses me ha ha ha know whadda mean.

Here the amused reader giggling to him- or herself is represented, enjoying a good gossip session, complete with the laughter. Part of the fun was the fear about what might find its way into Alcachofa’s pages; as one person remembered it, “te daba miedo aparecer allá” (you were scared to appear there). On the front cover of the third

issue—at the same time as the subtitle “chismecitos” no longer appeared for the column—this fear was captured with the following headline: “La Alcachofa: La Página Terror de los Latinos” (La Alcachofa: The Latinos’ Page of Terror). The reference here is clear: given the widespread fear of bombings in Tel Aviv, especially during the late nineties, La Alcachofa came to channel the teasing banter of Canchagoers into an explosive feature of the Saturday rituals.

Despite all the precautions taken to mitigate the sense of attack and diffuse responsibility, publishing alcachofas involved risks, as in all instances of spreading gossip. Some targets of alcachofas took offense, according to Andrea, and held the editors responsible. One offended target even managed to bring the editors to print a long apology in lieu of the usual alcachofas in the following issue. The case involved a widely known figure, named Claudia, who was famous for selling raffle tickets house to house; the alcachofa accused her of gossiping more than selling tickets. Straying from the supposed policy of not using real names, the apology mentions her full name, and is signed by Cecilio with his own full name (before launching into a further justification, see below, [9]). This was not the only occasion that the editors were made responsible for printing alcachofas. Andrea also recalled another case where her husband was attacked by a target after the story of his (the target’s) ill-fated extramarital affair ended up in an alcachofa. Such examples show there was no agreement about what constituted friendly barbs, versus attacks on reputations. Certainly, by publishing these stories, the editors were making them public knowledge in a more salient format than could be achieved by small group interactions. After all, the chismes turned alcachofas were disseminated in the middle of ritual space-time at La Cancha.

Despite the supposed “chistoso” nature of La Alcachofa, the possible moral inferences stemming from the printed chisme were made explicit in a small number of unusual alcachofas. On a couple of occasions, the editors used La Alcachofa as a kind of chisme clinic (cf. the rumor clinics mentioned in the introduction), where they sought to counter chismes with which they disagreed. In one instance, several issues of *Latinos de Hoy* mentioned the upcoming Tel Aviv concert of the famous Puerto Rican salsa star Victor Manuelle. According to Andrea, Cecilio himself was involved in organizing the concert. Close to the big date, La Alcachofa started with the following:

- (6) *Parece que existe en Tel Aviv uno o unas envidiosas por el concierto de Victor Manuel, no sabemos por que pues ya están diciendo que dicho concierto fue aplazado. Eso es mentira.*

It seems that in Tel Aviv there are one or many people [f.] envious of Victor Manuel’s [sic] concert, we don’t know why but they are already saying that said concert was postponed. That’s a lie.

Here, until the last sentence (“That’s a lie”), it seems like a regular alcachofa. This last sentence changes the footing; the editors are clearly no longer just claiming to be animators of what they heard. Envy is mentioned as the reason for the deception, a typical motivation given for the generation of chisme. The editors’ specific commitment to overturning this chisme became more apparent at the end of the same issue’s column:

- (7) *Y esto si no es chisme que Cecilio está vendiendo las boletas para el concierto de Victor Manuel. Tel 051-286345*

And this definitely is not a chisme that Cecilio is selling tickets for the Victor Manuel [sic] concert. Tel 051-286345

This unique alcachofa begins with a very prominent evidential frame (“And this is definitely not a chisme”), which mirrors the last sentence in (6). Cecilio was clearly very proud of his connection to the Victor Manuelle concert, and thus changed his role relation in La Alcachofa from supposedly being a simple animator to an overt principal.

Similarly, La Alcachofa was used a couple of times to elaborate moral principles by admonishing specific individuals about their behavior. In several of the editorials, Cecilio complained about rowdy behavior at La Cancha, and noted that Latinos had to preserve good conduct in public spaces, especially so as to not draw the attention of the police to a place where undocumented immigrants gathered. This is the intended message to someone called Tamara in the following:

- (8) *Se rumora que ciertas niñas latinas viajan a los tour's [sic] con algunos traguitos de más, y luego se dedican a "dar lora" en el autobús; y si están en algún lugar público se lucen; dejando en ridículo a sus compañeros y amigos . . . Compórtate Tamara!!!*
 It's rumored that certain Latina girls go on tours having a few too many drinks, and then they dedicate themselves to "make drama" on the bus; and if they are in a public place they put on a show; shaming their fellows and friends . . . Behave Tamara!!!

Again, as in (6), the alcachofa seems to begin like all others, using the various devices described above to compose what could be construed as a barb, although the censure is perhaps already signaled with the phrase "shaming their fellows and friends." The admonishment becomes clear in the last sentence, "Behave Tamara!!!," with its imperative form and addressing one of the targets by her first name. The shifted footing of the direct address is thus embedded in a larger alcachofa, where a number of principals were potentially signaled as interested parties, including the editors.

Despite these examples, overwhelmingly, the editors left implicit any moral principles involved in the alcachofas. They thus could continue to claim their roles were limited to being animators. Their justification of La Alcachofa, printed after the aforementioned apology to Claudia, is instructive in this regard. It reaffirms the benign reasons that the editors believed to lie behind the column, as well as how its targets should understand themselves as the local Latino celebrities:

- (9) *No siendo este incidente motivo para no continuar con nuestra entretenida y muy leída página seguiremos escribiendo esta sección, con más sabor a rosa y esperando que aquellas personas que figuren en esta sección se sientan orgullosas. De este modo queremos seguirlos entreteniendo, siendo conscientes, que el chismecito a todos les agrada.*

Since this incident isn't a reason to stop our entertaining and widely-read page, we'll keep writing this section, with even more taste for the famous and hoping that those people who are mentioned in this section will feel proud. In this way we want to keep entertaining you, being aware, that a little gossip pleases everyone.

When I asked Andrea what was meant by the phrase "más sabor a rosa," she explained that it referred to chismes of the heart and about the famous (cf. the phrase "la prensa rosa," explained in fn. 22), and here these were "the famous Colombians that were around at that time."

Beyond this, the editors' justification also clarifies the footing generally taken by La Alcachofa. The editors' Alcachofa was supposed to be an animator of discourse heard elsewhere. Yet authorship and principalship were less easily determined, and potentially involved all Cancha-goers and Alcachofa readers. The anonymous phone caller and the editors were jointly the immediate authors, using the generic devices described above, although by conventional inference, shadow conversations were also implicated. In (9), the reader is explicitly invited to see him- or herself as part of a principal committed not necessarily to the truth of the alcachofas, but rather to their entertaining value. (Indeed, it was clear in my interviews with Andrea that amusement and not true representation was the measure of what was printed.) Targets of alcachofas were not supposed to see themselves as offended principals, but enjoy their role, implicitly compared to celebrities of gossip columns in their countries of origin.

Thus the readership of La Cancha and beyond was incorporated as a group of (Goffmanian) co-principals to La Alcachofa, and potential co-authors, within the more general perspective elaborated throughout the local news sections of *Latinos*

de Hoy. In this context, La Alcachofa constituted a “voice from nowhere,” different than that of realist reportage or editorials of newspapers and novels described for emergent nationalist or bourgeois imagination of print-mediated publics (Anderson 1991, Habermas 1989, Warner 1990; see also commentaries in Gal and Woolard 2001, Silverstein 2000). It might be said that *Latinos de Hoy*, being a small medium (see Spitalnik 2002), that survived for only a short time among a highly marginalized group, and that never had any impact on the more central public forums of Israel or of the various Latin American countries of origin, cannot be compared to such examples. Those print-mediated publics after all had a far larger reach and—to the extent they were successful—forged a sense of solidarity among strangers. However, such a reading would miss the point here about the relationalities of public and private spaces, of broadcast and interpersonal modes of communication, and of more and less authoritative discourses. First, considering Gal’s argument regarding the fractal indexical qualities of public and private, La Alcachofa transposed supposedly private discourses into a broadcast print format connected to the secular, ritual chronotope of La Cancha. Secondly, the fact that such a marginalized group came to see their groupness in the image of chisme and not, say, the fact-based journalism of the bourgeois public, is important precisely because it reflects Latinos keen sense of their peripheral position vis-à-vis influential Israeli public forums, where true authority could be established. Their public congregated at La Cancha, never at the ritual sites of the Israeli state and civil society. Indeed, as I will discuss next, it is exactly these relationalities which were at stake when a Latino wanted to quash a chisme.

Putting on a Chisme Clinic: Authority and Realism in Quashing a Chisme

The two examples of alcachofas which led to repercussions for the editors point up a factor that has yet to be examined systematically in studies of gossip. Namely, whether a given occasion of speaking is labeled “gossip” or “rumor” is itself part of the everyday politics of communal discursive life. The use of such descriptors instantiates the perspective of some actor, constituting their evaluation of a particular interaction. By using evidential frames, the editors of La Alcachofa in some sense acknowledged the diffused responsibility and low degree of certainty which characterized the information passed on in such a manner. They thus adopted this as a perspective on their own discourse.

Yet, establishing such a perspective can be the subject of intense conflict, where issues of authority and evidence come to the fore, in the politics of “entextualizing authoritatively” (Silverstein and Urban 1996: 11). By looking at the process of quashing an anonymous attack on a prominent Latino, I show how an authoritative structure is produced as part of reconstituting a perspective on events with the descriptor *chisme*. Not surprisingly, part of this process involves reversing the diffuseness of responsibility, and pinning the attack on particular, interested individuals, here helped along by calling them *chismosos*. Equally importantly, the process included invoking links to Israeli centers of authority, including the state. This process played itself out in what I call, with allusion to Allport and Postman (see introduction), a chisme clinic.

The fragile legal status of Latinos is at the heart of the social drama in my example. Prior to 2002, there were many and important Latino formal social organizations in Israel. With the advent of the Immigration Police in 2002, these organizations were all but destroyed, driving Latinos into ever more private spaces as they sought to escape the attention of the state’s enforcers. One that remained fairly strong was La Escuelita (the little school) a twice-weekly after-school program, dedicated to teaching Latino children, ages 5–15, standard Spanish and literacy, as well as “Latin American culture.”

La Escuelita was under threat of being disbanded when Diego Manuel, its ubiquitous director and a close friend of mine, faced anonymous denunciations.²⁹ Diego Manuel was an important figure, not only because of his role as the director of La Escuelita. He was also one of the more widely recognized *animadores* (animators), that

is, a verbal master, who, with a glib tongue and ribald sense of humor is often called upon to liven up or emcee important public events. Furthermore, he is bi-lingual, highly-literate in both Spanish and Hebrew, and has legal status in Israel due to his common-law Israeli boyfriend.

In general, little issue was made about his openly gay identity, but suddenly, in early 2005, this became a central vector for anonymous criticism. What occasioned the first denunciation against him was his decision to screen a Colombian-French co-produced movie called *La Virgen de Los Sicarios*, (Our Lady of the Assassins) to the oldest group of Escuelita kids aged 10–15. The movie was screened when Diego Manuel and another teacher both had to be absent one day, and Diego Manuel believed that showing a movie would give the two last-minute substitutes, gay men themselves, an easy lesson plan.

Further, according to Diego Manuel, there was a good reason to choose the film. It depicts a Colombian intellectual returning after a lengthy exile to the city of Medellín, where he strikes up love affairs with two youths, petty assassins in the gang wars. Directed by Barbet Schroeder, who is associated with French *cinéma vérité*, the film uses gang members as actors and includes numerous scenes depicting impoverished children on the streets of Medellín, including their drug use and violence. It was this Colombian “reality,” of children with no future, which Diego Manuel later claimed was the reason for showing the film to the students. He felt they were going through a period of low motivation towards school and that seeing the film would help them to realize their good fortune to be in Israel. Indeed, this “reality” of children having to fend for themselves or work to help their families was often noted to me by parents who sometimes saw their Israel-raised children as spoiled, incognizant of the lives of poor families in Latin America.

The problem with Diego Manuel’s lesson plan was that the movie opens in a brothel where the returning Colombian intellectual meets and has sex with one of the youths. That scene led two older Escuelita students to stand up in protest, scream at the substitute teachers, and leave the room enraged. As it was later related, these two kids complained to a mother who happened to be there, and so a chisme was born: La Escuelita was showing gay pornography to boys, to make them gay like the director and his friends.³⁰

No direct complaint was made to anyone associated with La Escuelita, but four mothers, all close friends, simultaneously stopped sending their children. After some time, Diego Manuel told me of a letter that arrived to a Spanish-language magazine, from four unnamed parents, complaining about teachers trying to influence the sexual preferences of their children.³¹ This constituted the first public denunciation, which was clearly directed at Diego Manuel. About a month later, one of the four mothers spoke to Diego Manuel, and admitted that she had stopped sending her two children on account of the movie.

In response, Diego Manuel started calling the reaction of the parents a “chisme,” and he set out to inform the teachers and parents of La Escuelita.³² He held two meetings, first with the teachers and then with the parents, to explain what had happened and to take responsibility for showing the movie. He thus gained the support of the teachers and most parents. In the meeting, several parents spontaneously started calling the four dissenters “viejas chismosas,” (gossipy old hags) thereby adopting Diego Manuel’s descriptor of the denunciation and also his version of events: it was those who spread the story that were responsible for the problems.

Yet his victory was incomplete. A month and a half later, Diego Manuel found out that someone sent a second and more serious denunciation against him. It came in the form of an e-mail and was sent to the same Spanish-language newspaper as well as to a municipal agency. The e-mail claimed to be from a Colombian who had returned to Colombia, and accused him of having molested young pupils in the past. The source given was scripted as hearsay: the writer maintained that he or she heard about this from a friend whose son was molested by Diego Manuel. The municipal social work office, dedicated to dealing with welfare problems of foreign workers was nominally

responsible for La Escuelita. In a meeting, the director told Diego Manuel that they were considering starting an investigation.

Diego Manuel was furious about these anonymous denunciations, the impact on his good name, and the suspicions which could lead to police involvement. His leadership and continuing involvement in La Escuelita was in jeopardy. He again organized a chisme clinic to quash the attack but had much more success the second time. First he spoke with the teachers, again securing his version of events and their support. Then, another meeting was held with parents. Although many told him to avoid mentioning the actual claims made in the email, Diego Manuel, a verbal master, ended up revealing all for a group of parents eager to leap to his defense, ultimately by spreading his antichisme and bringing complete silence to his anonymous adversaries.

What did he do in these meetings to bring teachers and parents to his side? Space only allows a brief sketch. First, he used the Escuelita as a position of influence. All the teachers supported him, and the teachers were generally respected by parents. Indeed, parents often depended on teachers to help them deal with Israeli authorities and employers. In both meetings with parents, the teachers sat next to Diego Manuel at the front of the classroom facing the parents, allowing an easily identifiable and united “we” when he referred to the administrators of La Escuelita. Second, since parent attendance at meetings was always a problem, he ensured a good turnout by announcing in advance that information regarding children’s legal status in the country would be delivered at the meeting. This further augmented La Escuelita’s position as an important mediator between Israeli public forums and parents, underlining Diego Manuel’s ability to access the former. Third, in the meetings, Diego Manuel parlayed this mediator position into a voice of authority about what he continued to call “chismes”: just as he spoke authoritatively about the legal status of children, and was able to tell parents in attendance which rumors were accurate and which were not, he went on to speak about the stories being spread about him and La Escuelita. He explicitly evaluated the evidence against him, further displaying his authority. Fourth, he came off as straightforward, something the parents emphasized in their response. He took responsibility for his error in choosing a movie that was “demasiado fuerte” (too strong) for pupils. On the other hand, as several mothers in attendance noted to me later, those who were making accusations did not even “show their face” (*dar la cara*). This was helped by the parents’ acceptance about the reasons for showing the film: just as the movie showed a Colombian reality frankly, so Diego Manuel could speak realistically about Latinos who are wont to *chismosear* (tell chismes). In both meetings, many mothers agreed with his assessment of the realism of the film, so an opposition was created between Diego Manuel who could produce a realistic narrative about the events, and his accusers, who did not even show up to defend their claims.³³ Finally, he used his legal status to his advantage: he warned that he would go to the police to defend his good name. For undocumented immigrants who live in constant fear of deportation, such a threat was heard loud and clear.

His tactics were extremely successful. At the second meeting, all 22 parents of their own initiative signed a letter to the municipal social work agency stating their full confidence in Diego Manuel. Although the dissenting mothers did not turn up to the meeting, within a week, two of them contacted Diego Manuel to assure him that it was not them who had sent the e-mail. After all, they both said, they had no idea how to write email. Clearly, the channels by which chisme travel were used to relay what had happened at the meeting. The social work agency apparently replied to the denunciation by e-mail, asking for additional proof, but never heard back. Never again did the accusations surface. The denunciations were thus quashed through a series of public events, where Diego Manuel successfully produced a chisme clinic that involved labeling the accusations as “chisme.” In short, for all intents and purposes he silenced his critics as marginal chismosos.

Conclusions

This final example points up a tacit assumption in much work on gossip and rumor: the opposition between genres considered to have no clear author or source to those considered more authoritative, and the association of the former with more private or off-stage nodes of transmission and the latter with more public ones. By separating out these associations analytically, it becomes clearer how the conflations are established in particular moments and sites of social life, and thus how social identities and groupness might be linked to interactional genres like those called “gossip.”

For Latinos in Israel, given their position as a highly marginalized group of labor migrants, the most authoritative communication occurs in Hebrew-speaking public forums, often through mass media, to which they have limited access. Therefore, it is an actor like Diego Manuel, who can mediate between Israeli and Latino spheres, and who is a gifted public speaker, that can more easily inhabit the role of an authority, at least vis-à-vis less well positioned Latinos. Latinos’ stereotype about themselves as “chismosos” then is in part related to their general inability to inhabit such roles in Israel, barred as they were from the most important public spaces. Here too is an explanation for the feeling many voiced that they could never fully trust information received from another Latino. Such interplay between status and roles is often alluded to, but all too often scholars continue to treat the gossipy quality of small—and usually marginal—groups as natural and inherent to small group dynamics. This is the case even where it is recognized that gossip and rumor are not the purview of the marginalized alone.

Further, here it has been argued that a key element of such interplay is found in the evidential functions of descriptors like *gossip* and *rumor*, which serve to index an earlier communicative event as the source, and, at a second order of indexicality, to signal a limited degree of commitment to the validity of the knowledge thus characterized. Tracing the use of such descriptors, or the evidential markings that are associated with such genres, helps develop a concept of gossip and rumor that is perspectival and processual. Perspectival because actors will differ as to whether they believe that there is a valid source for some story, whether it is or is not gossip or rumor. And consequently, processual in three ways: first, because determining what is and what is not a valid, well sourced story is given to social practices of ascribing authority. Second, because the acts of assigning responsibility and evaluating a source are integrally linked and often co-constitutive (see Hill and Irvine 1993). Third, because there is a resulting dialectic between the kinds of texts that are called “chisme” or “rumor” and the dimensions of their textuality, whether the more formal, denotational aspects, like the evidential framings reviewed here, or the interactional aspects, like the specific groups of people who come together in specific times and places to share a tale.

Such a conception further integrates the traditional insights from the anthropology of gossip, discussed in the introduction, regarding the sense of groupness which seems to emerge from gossip, and regarding the interested action that seems to derive from actors and factions. The examples from the magazine *Latinos de Hoy*—in particular its popular gossip column La Alcachofa—and from the attacks on Diego Manuel show how a particular group comes to substantiate the form projected by the evidential markings of printed chismes, just as individuals use chisme strategically. The manner in which the magazine constituted the perspective of those who frequented La Cancha (the soccer field) further suggests how Latinos come to understand themselves as prone to gossip: by seeking to capture the regular chatter and banter of Cancha-goers, La Alcachofa emblematised a popular genre as a sign of being Latino in Israel, and thus made it more salient as a Latino quality.

Finally, as mentioned above, La Alcachofa constituted a “voice from nowhere” for the readership of *Latinos de Hoy*. The fact that a reading public came briefly into being

in the image of chismosos—and see all the caveats discussed above—presents problems for theories of more prominent publics based solely on a notion of a form of “address” (e.g., Warner 2002). That is, what distinguishes these more canonical publics cannot be elucidated without inquiring further into how evidence, responsibility and authority accrue to particular interactional genres, how an emblem of circulation can thus emerge, and how this creates interdiscursive relations between the relevant genres. In short, much work still needs to be done to describe the means by which participants recognize an “address” as a public one. Here, I’ve suggested how the formal marking of evidentiality, the ritual chronotope of La Cancha, and the marginal position of Latinos in Israel are related to produce the sentiment that Latinos are a bunch of chismosos, and that this sentiment is in fact an understanding of how Latinos engage in public matters.

Notes

Acknowledgments. This article is based on data taken from two and a half years of dissertation fieldwork, mostly between 2004 and 2006, with non-Jewish, Latin American labor migrants and their children in Israel. My first debt of gratitude is owed to those Latinos who made time to help me understand how chisme shapes their discursive lives, and especially to one who spent part of his holiday in Colombia photocopying the entire series of *Latinos de Hoy*. They remain unnamed to protect their privacy. My research was graciously funded by a National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant in Anthropology and Linguistics, a Wenner-Gren Foundation Dissertation Fieldwork Grant, and a Fulbright-Hayes Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Grant, while my post-field time writing was helped along by two Schusterman Awards in Israel Studies. The article, which started as a dissertation chapter, has been immensely improved due to the criticisms received in a session of the “Semiotics: Culture in Context” Workshop at the University of Chicago in 2007, then of the “Semiotics Circle of Toronto” in 2008, and finally at an AAA panel on gossip, rumor, and scandal in 2008. I am grateful to the audiences of all these, and particularly thankful to Andy Graan for being a respondent at the first, John Haviland for being a discussant at the last, and to Jack Sidnell for giving me the opportunity to rewrite at the second and co-organizing the third. Special thanks are also due to Michael Silverstein, Susan Gal, Amy Dahlstrom, Paul Manning, Miyako Inoue, Chris Ball, Santiago Giraldo, Natalie Rothman, and two anonymous reviewers of the *JLA*. Lest I seem too chismoso, all responsibility for its shortcomings is of course mine.

1. Note that the noun/adjective *chismoso* is formed from the stem [chisme-]_N plus the suffix [-oso]_{N/Adj} where the suffix has its characteristic meaning “full of” (cf. *ansioso*, *mocoso*, *garbososo*, *goloso*, etc.)

2. Pseudonyms are used to protect the privacy of informants.

3. Eilat is the Red Sea beach resort on the southernmost tip of Israel, and is as far as most Latinos travel when they have a break from work. As undocumented migrants, they cannot return to Israel if they leave. To reach Eilat, Latinos take cars or buses for four hours through the Negev Desert, and thus it is considered a faraway paradise by those who frequent it. To make it more attractive, and to encourage population settlement there, the state exempts it from various taxes, including the 17 percent VAT. Thus, Latinos, like other foreign and domestic tourists, like to shop in its many cavernous, air-conditioned malls for luxury goods.

4. For comments on the competing viewpoints and traditions of Gluckman and Paine, see Handelman (1973: 210), Haviland (1977: 6–11), Merry (1984: 273–275), and Stewart and Strathern (2004: 29–39).

5. If this is correct, it would help to explain the inherent sense of “publicity” that scholars seem to find with genres that function with a broadcast mode, versus the sense of privacy available to the interpersonal modes. See Spitulnik (2002) and Agha (2007: 69–70) on the difference between broadcast (or mass) and interpersonal conversational modes of communication. It is important to note, as Agha does, that broadcast does not necessarily involve electronic or print media.

6. By “discursively nonpresent,” I am invoking the concept of “nonperson” in Benveniste’s sense (1971). Haviland (1977: 225, n. 1) uses this explicitly as his definition, following Handelman (1973). Note that one of Handelman’s examples of a gossip session actually takes place in the hearing of the targeted person, which would seem to make the target an overhearer, in Goffman’s terms.

7. An exception to this usage of “rumor” would be Firth’s early exploration of the subject from Tikopia (1967 [1956]), presumably written outside of the tradition started by Gluckman. On Tikopia, Firth was constantly asked to confirm what he calls “rumors” about the comings and goings of ships and Tikopians. The sensitivity of his use of rumor to describe a source which Tikopians seem to have considered outside of the immediate bounded group helps confirm the general argument here.

8. Establishing that authority is not straightforward, and is always given to its own risks. Perhaps that is why, in the recent presidential election, the Barack Obama campaign set up a separate website in June 2008 to battle various stories that circulated about him (fightthesmears.com). This replaced an earlier effort that was connected to the campaign’s main website, factcheck.barackobama.com. Supporters of the campaign debated whether having a website at all was an effective way of fighting rumors, or if it would help to spread them.

9. A word of caution: I am not revisiting the attempts to map out stereotypic meanings of lexemes that seem closest to our own *gossip* and *rumor*, as a simple exercise in definition. Instead I am investigating the relation between such stereotypic meanings and the indexicalities lexicalized by the descriptors.

10. Roman Jakobson (1971) famously formalized this as E^{NE^NS}/E^S . Although he generalized over all types of evidentials, his analysis applies specifically to the reportative or hearsay variety.

11. In his article, Kockelman shows how this functions with complement-taking predicates as well as modal clitics. The prominence of complement-taking predicates in my examples below is clearly further confirmation of such an approach. See Silverstein (2003) for an explanation on indexical orders.

12. For general descriptions, see collections edited by Chafe and Nichols (1986) and Aikhenvald and Dixon (2003). For more pragmatic approaches, as well as suggestions about the discursive and diachronic points of departure for evidentiality, see Silverstein (1978), Hanks (1984), and Haviland (1987).

13. There are more complex systems as well, which include different kinds of sensory perception, or more than one form of inference (see Aikhenvald 2003). Part of the problem in identifying evidential systems is their close relation to status (epistemic modality). Linguists have not yet fully worked out their methods of describing these denotational-indexicals to sort out the differences cross-linguistically.

14. For excellent discussions on these types of complex interactions in three languages of the same branch of Tibeto-Burman, as well as remarks on English, see Woodbury (1986) and following him, Agha (1993: Ch. 5) and Bendix (1993). Various recent works on Spanish, while not using the framework of interacting grammatical categories proposed by these authors, seem to indicate its relevance to formal registers (Bermudez 2005, Gallardo 1999, Squartini 2001). Spanish also has a nonobligatory quotative particular *dizque*, which is used extensively in Colombian Spanish (see Travis [(2006)]). Chafe (1986) does a preliminary sketch of the variety formal categories that can be used in English.

15. I am very grateful to Santiago Giraldo for telling me about this saying.

16. Space does not allow a full examination of the issue, but, although Latinos (like other labor migrants) were for the most part excluded from participating in Israeli public forums, sometimes they were clearly considered to be what Goffman would call “overhears” of official announcements thus transmitted. The expectation was that NGOs, employers, or some other Israeli or labor migrant with access would spread the news to these undocumented immigrants. Secondly, I should note that my argument is not that there was a conscious moment of separating out chisme from rumor, but rather that the pre-existing distinction of in-group versus out-group source was remapped by migrants to Latino versus Israeli source. This kind of refunctionalization of indexicalities is very common in immigrant minority contexts, as I argue in my dissertation research.

17. One estimate from Israeli sociologists of the number of Latinos in the late nineties was 10–15,000 (Schammah Gesser, Rajman, et al. 2000). Although it is difficult to know how many Latinos were deported by the Immigration Police, or left in fear of them, it would not be surprising to discover that the number was between one-half to two-thirds.

18. Actually, from internal references in *Latinos de Hoy*, it seems that the round-ups of undocumented residents at La Cancha predated the Immigration Police. Already in 2001, a year earlier, there are references to the progressive destruction of La Cancha by police raids.

19. In Israel, the weekend for most starts Friday afternoon, with the entry of Shabbat, and then goes until Saturday night. Sunday is the first day of the workweek. Many Latinos also work fewer hours on Friday.

20. Although I did not do fieldwork during the time the magazine appeared, my friend and informant Andrea, who had started the magazine with her husband, helped me get a hold of copies of all but one of the thirty-two published issues. She also described for me in long interviews how it was put together and helped me reconstruct many of the obscure references.

21. According to Andrea's description, they would work on the periodical after they returned from work each evening, and sometimes continue into the wee hours of the morning to make sure they met deadlines. Any extra money from sales and advertising went to office equipment, like extra computers that were needed.

22. I am grateful to Santiago Giraldo who pointed out to me that even some of the most serious and widespread daily newspapers and weekly news magazines in Colombia have columns dedicated to gossip and rumor about political and cultural celebrities. For example, *El Tiempo* (eltiempo.com) has a column called "Teléfono Rosa," the pink telephone, a reference no doubt to "prensa rosa" (pink press) or tabloid-like reporting on celebrities, *Cambio* (cambio.com.co) has one called "Secretos" (secrets), and *Semana* (semana.com) has one named "Confidenciales" (confidentialities). Online, each of these is a separate webpage linked on the homepage, except in the case of *El Tiempo*, which requires selecting the link from a drop-down menu. However, the style of these columns does not use any of the overt generic conventions of chisme that I describe below (evidential frames, nicknames, colloquialisms, etc.). That is, they do not attempt to transpose the voice (in Bakhtin's sense) of the chismoso by using the associated register. They are however short, and by their separation and column titles, are not held accountable to journalistic standards in the same way as the rest of the reporting (Santiago even gave me an account of one instance where misreporting did not lead to printing a correction). On the other hand, a local online newspaper of Cartago (cartagonoticias.com), which seeks to become the major information source about local events for Cartagüeños outside of the city, has a dedicated gossip column called "El Chismógrafo de Domitila" (the gossip notebook of Domitila) which does use all the devices described below, associated with the chismoso. In fact, the very subtitle is "se dice por ahí . . . me contaron que . . ." (it's said around there . . . they told me that . . .), that is, the very evidential frames used in La Alcachofa.

23. Besides the picture, the figure of the "vieja chismosa" (gossipy old hag) was widespread. For example, in one of the plays put on by La Escuelita for its annual festival, a "typical" dysfunctional household was depicted with a soccer-mad husband and an unhappy, ignored wife; the chorus' role was played as two viejas chismosas. On another occasion, one fellow told me that to his mind, men were bigger gossips than women, that is, taking this position in contrast to prevailing views.

24. Evidential frames are a subclass of what Silverstein (1985) calls "metapragmatic frames."

25. In the case of the spatial deictic, such nonreferential uses are similar to English usage of *here and there*, as in the (evasive) response to the question "Where were you?" "Y'know, here and there."

26. Compare here Besnier's (1989: 325–333) excellent example and discussion of the use of information-withholding sequences to initiate or make overt a gossip session, while simultaneously drawing other participants into the interaction in such a way to distribute responsibility for what is said and thus mitigating the negative moral judgment of engaging in gossip.

27. In fact, the term *chisme* was only used twice, once at the beginning of an Alcachofa column reproduced here as example (5), and a second time to state that what followed is not a chisme (example [7]).

28. The verb *cachar* "to understand" is a Chilean regionalism, as is the particular non-standard second person declination of the verb "cachai" instead of standard "cachaste." It is used in certain informal contexts to secure a backchannel.

29. Denunciation here is used in the sense of Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately (1996) where (in their case) citizens send usually written communications to some authoritative (state) institution or possibly public forums like newspapers, complaining of wrong-doing by officials or other citizens. They distinguish this act from that of a regular "informer," who is in a routine and often paid relation with police. Denunciations can be anonymous, and often include reference to the moral principles that guide the act, such as loyalty to the state, fighting corruption, etc.

30. This narrative is highly condensed. In fact, before starting the movie, one of the substitute teachers consulted with me, stating that he did not feel it would be appropriate for such

young kids. I found another video and left it playing (leaving to attend my own class), but apparently it stopped working. The other substitute teacher then started *La Virgen de los Sicarios*.

31. Three of the mothers signed only with initials, and the other with a name, but they did not match the names of the mothers who stopped sending their children.

32. Several of us teachers already suspected that the children were not returning because of the movie, but since sometimes students would miss school for several weeks, it was not clear that they had actually stopped coming, as opposed to simply missing classes.

33. This opposition was further aided by the fact that Diego Manuel is considered so well integrated into Israeli society: whereas he can speak frankly like Israelis, his accusers were too Latino because they covered their trails and spoke behind one another's backs. This draws on widespread stereotypes about the differences between Israeli and Latino norms of directness.

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