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As a Chateaubriand fellow, I had the opportunity to grow both academically and personally in carrying out the fieldwork for my dissertation in the south of France. In designing my dissertation project, I sought to conduct longitudinal ethnographic research in order to gain greater insight into the daily socializing experiences of “Gitan” (Roma) students at school, where they are exposed to unfamiliar linguistic and cultural practices in French, their first language being a variety of Catalan. Although it is important to read broadly in preparing for fieldwork, nothing could prepare me for the experience of growing into a researcher on the ground. As I observed language socialization in the classroom on a daily basis, I simultaneously found myself socialized in new ways—as a non-Gitan and non-French new-comer, an American visitor to French schools, a classroom assistant, a classroom observer, an impromptu English teacher—in an unfamiliar context. My unique subjectivity and the inter-cultural exchanges with students and instructors at my focal school sites and with colleagues at the Université de Montpellier III nuanced the scope of my research project, my understanding of approaches to language learning and identity in France, and my reflections on educational contexts in the US that represent useful comparisons to my research context in France. Focal school instructors and university researchers were occasionally surprised by my observations and questions concerning students’ schooling experiences and identity, and we benefited from an open exchange. In turn, my geographic and cultural distance paradoxically afforded me greater proximity to the Gitan community, and I was welcomed by families with a mixture of intrigue and interest as a non-French newcomer to their schools and neighborhood. I am immensely grateful to the Chateaubriand Fellowship Program for allowing me to engage in dissertation research in France, where I was able to learn from, collaborate with, and exchange perspectives with French researchers, instructors, and students and their families. Their voices have shaped my research project and my perspective as scholar committed to intercultural research.