

Feature Article

Border Crossing in the Classroom through Performed Ethnography

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In this essay I share the ways I have used performed ethnography to explore the notion of border crossing in an undergraduate course called “Equity and Activism in Education.” Performed ethnography involves turning the findings of ethnographic research into a play script. My students read two performed ethnographies, *Harriet’s House* and *Ana’s Shadow*, based on ethnographic research I had conducted about the lives of transnational adoptive LGBTQ families. They then reflected upon the ways they themselves had crossed borders in their families and schools, and how their own border crossing experiences might influence their future activist work in education.

Keywords: performed ethnography, identity, border crossing, teacher education

In this reflective essay I want to share the ways my students and I have made use of the notion of “border crossing” in an undergraduate course called “Equity and Activism in Education” that is offered at the University of Toronto.

The concept of border crossing has been traced back to the writing of Gloria Anzaldúa (1942–2004), who was a scholar of Chicana cultural theory, feminist theory, and queer theory (Behar, 1997; Niday & Allender, 2000). Self-described as a “queer Chicana Tejana feminist patlache poet, fictionist, and cultural theorist” (Trujillo, 1997), Anzaldúa was interested in analyzing the everyday experiences of people who, like herself, straddled borders of race, ethnicity, language, gender, sexuality, and geography. To illustrate the kind of analytical work Anzaldúa was engaged in, here is an example from her 1987 book *Borderlands/La Frontera*:

Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English

speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 59)

Like Anzaldúa, most of the students in my Equity and Activism in Education course cross a variety of borders in their everyday lives. Therefore when I designed the set of final assignments, I included an assignment that would give students an opportunity to reflect on the significant ways they have crossed borders in their families and schools, and the ways that their own border crossing experiences might influence their activist work in education. The final assignment featured two “performed ethnographies” I have written called *Harriet’s House* (Goldstein, 2012) and *Ana’s Shadow* (Goldstein, 2013). As will be explained in greater detail below, performed ethnography involves turning the findings of ethnographic research into a play script that can be read aloud by a group of participants or performed before audiences. The play scripts *Harriet’s House* and *Ana’s Shadow* were based on ethnographic research I had conducted about the lives of transnational adoptive LGBTQ families (Goldstein, 2013).

I begin this reflection with a description of my Equity and Activism in Education course and the reasons why I thought working with a set of ethnographic plays about a transnational adoptive LGBTQ family might be important to students interested in equity, activism, and education. I continue with a brief history of the development of the field of performed ethnography to provide readers with an understanding of the pedagogical power that ethnographic play reading can bring to the classroom. Having set the context for my reflective study, I describe four different kinds of border crossing that appear in *Harriet’s House* and *Ana’s Shadow*. I then analyze the ways my students reflected upon the different kinds of border crossing portrayed in the plays. I conclude with a summary of what I’ve learned.

Context: Equity Studies at the University of Toronto

The Equity Studies program at the University of Toronto is an interdisciplinary program that offers students opportunities to learn about social justice theories and practices in a variety of local and global contexts. There are three areas of emphasis in the program: disability studies, global food equity, and social advocacy. My course, Equity and Activism in Education, is part of the social advocacy emphasis. The goal of the course is to have students examine contemporary issues in schooling from an equity and social justice perspective. The course engages with a variety of theoretical frameworks including anti-oppression education, anti-homophobia, and anti-transphobia education, critical pedagogy, critical race theory, culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy, decolonizing knowledges, and intersectionality theory. In addition to understanding how inequities are created and sustained in our public schooling systems, I also introduce my students to a range of school activist projects that attempt to challenge and address inequities. The course is considered a general education undergraduate course and is not part of the University of Toronto’s teacher education programming offered at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). While some of my students are interested in becoming certified teachers and eventually apply to and enroll in one of OISE’s teacher education programs, most students are interested in taking the

course so that they can better understand the kinds of inequities that characterize K-12 and postsecondary public schooling and the kinds of educational activist projects that are needed to create a more level playing field.

Harriet's House and Ana's Shadow

I decided to include *Harriet's House* and *Ana's Shadow* in my Equity and Activism in Education course so I could introduce my students to a family that has not always been well-served in public elementary and secondary schools. The family featured in the ethnographic plays includes a mother named Harriet, her partner/wife Marty, and their three daughters Luisa, Ana, and Clare. Harriet adopted Luisa and Ana from an orphanage in Bogotá, Colombia, when the girls were ten and seven, respectively. Clare, who is Luisa and Ana's younger sister, is Harriet's birth daughter. The first play, *Harriet's House*, focuses on 17-year old Luisa's desire to return to Bogotá to find out what happened to her birth mother. *Ana's Shadow* picks up the story of Harriet's family three years later and focuses on 19-year old Ana, a singer-songwriter, who has no interest in speaking Spanish with her sister or returning to Colombia. Bilingual, mixed race, and lesbian families like Harriet's face a number of issues in Toronto schools. As Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) argues, children and youth who use first or heritage languages like Spanish at school are often punished and told that they must use English (or French if they are enrolled in a French school) (Goldstein, 2003). They learn that languages other than English (or French) are illegitimate, unworthy, or inferior. Children and youth from mixed race or non-White families in Toronto often face racism at school (Dei et al., 1997; Ghosh, 2010; Goldstein, 2003) and children and youth from LGBTQ families often face homophobia and heterosexism (Epstein 2013; Taylor et al., 2011). Engaging with the issues that bilingual, mixed race, and LGBTQ families face through performed ethnography can help prepare educational activists and teachers to think about ways to respond to linguism, racism, homophobia and heterosexism (Goldstein, 2014).

Performed Ethnography

Performed ethnography, also known as performance ethnography (Denzin, 2003) and ethnodrama (Saldaña, 2005, 2011), turns the findings of ethnographic research into a play script that can be read aloud by a group of participants or performed before audiences. As a researcher who has been trained as an educational ethnographer within anthropological traditions, I locate my performed ethnography work within the "literary turn" of American anthropology that began in the mid-1980s (Behar, 1995; Clifford 1983, 1986; Clifford & Marcus, 1986). The turn was set off by discussions about the predicaments of cultural representation in ethnography raised in the 1986 anthology *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). The anthology was edited by James Clifford, a historian of anthropology, and George Marcus, an anthropologist and critic of "realist" traditions in ethnographic writing. As explained by feminist anthropologist Ruth Behar (1995), the book's purpose was to make an incredibly obvious point: anthropologists write. And the ethnographies they write—"a strange cross between the realist novel, the travel account, the memoir, and the scientific report" (p. 3)—had to be understood in terms of poetics and politics.

At the heart of the literary turn in American anthropology was the understanding that ethnographers *invent* rather than represent ethnographic truths. Ethnographies were not transparent mirrors of culture that traditionally trained realist ethnographers presumed them to be. The contributors of *Writing Culture* also questioned the politics of a poetics, that is, a system of writing, which relied on the words and stories of (frequently less privileged) others for its existence without providing any of the benefits of authorship to the research participants who assisted the anthropologist in the writing of their culture.

In response to these predicaments of cultural representation, James Clifford set out a new agenda for American anthropology in his introduction to *Writing Culture*: anthropology needed to encourage more innovative, dialogic, and experimental writing that highlighted the ways ethnographies are invented by the ethnographers who write them. At the same time, the “new ethnography” needed to reflect a more profound self-consciousness of the workings of power and the partialness of all truth, both in the text and in the world. As summarized by Ruth Behar, while the new ethnography would not resolve the profoundly troubling issues of inequality in a world fueled by global capitalism, it could at least attempt to decolonize the power relations inherent in the presentation of “Other people”.

When I write up ethnographic research for others in the form of a play that features conflicts research participants have actually experienced, dialogue that is based on interview transcripts and personal narratives but characters who are fictional, I am able to remind my readers that ethnographers invent rather than represent ethnographic truths. I am able to highlight that ethnographers write “true fictions” (Clifford, 1986) and that ethnography is an interpretative, subjective, value-laden project.

The ethnographic research that has informed the writing of *Harriet’s House* and *Ana’s Shadow* comes from (1) my reading of a variety of personal narratives about growing up and living in transnational adoptive and LGBTQ families (e.g., Bonkowski, 2005; Gray, 2009; Register, 2005; Trenka, 2009, 2005; Trenka, Oparah, and Shin 2006); (2) my viewing of a number of film documentaries about growing up and living in these families (for example, Boluda, 2005; Opper, 2009); and (3) a set of interviews I undertook with people living in transnational adoptive LGBTQ families. I undertook this research from 2011 to 2014 as part of a study entitled “Teaching Other People’s Children: Two Performed Ethnographies for Teacher Education.”¹ The study had two objectives. The first objective was to create a pair of ethnographic play scripts that would document and disseminate the everyday experiences of transnational adoptive LGBTQ families. These are experiences that have not yet been widely documented or shared. The second objective was to document and analyze the kind of engagement, if any, that was provoked when teachers read, performed and discussed the play scripts.

Reading, Discussing, and Reflecting on *Harriet’s House* and *Ana’s Shadow*

Working with *Harriet’s House* and *Ana’s Shadow* was one of several final course assignments my students could complete. The assignment involved:

¹ “Teaching Other People’s Children: Two Performed Ethnographies for Teacher Education” was funded by a Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Standard Research Grant from 2011-2014.

1. Completing an individual reading of the plays before our collective group reading;
2. Participating in a collective reading and discussion of the plays; and
3. Completing an individual written reflection.

In the analysis below I present excerpts from a set of assignments written by seven students enrolled in my 2011 Equity, Activism, and Education course. The students, whose work appears anonymously here, were all in their early twenties when they took the course. In their responses to *Harriet's House* and *Ana's Shadow* my students discuss border crossing in reference to their own lives as well as the lives of the youth they currently work with or want to work with upon graduating from university.

In examining the ways my students analyze moments of border crossing in *Harriet's House*, *Ana's Shadow*, and their own lives, I use a framework developed by psychologist Maria Root. Root (1996) proposes four ways of thinking about border crossings: (1) People can “bridge” linguistic, cultural, racial, and national borders by creating meaningful connections in two or more communities and by moving back and forth between them; (2) they can choose to “camp” or put down roots in one community for extended periods of time and decide to make their way into other “camps” from time to time; (3) they can decide to sit on the border between communities and use their experiences on that border as a central reference point for living their lives, and (4) they can choose to foreground particular identities and background others in different situations or contexts.

I didn't come across Maria Root's framework until after I had started teaching with the plays, so her framework did not inform the writing or development of *Harriet's House* and *Ana's Shadow*. However, now that I have been introduced to her framework, I find it helpful for analyzing the ways I portrayed moments of border crossing in the plays and the ways my students have responded to them.

In the discussion that follows, I use Root's framework to discuss four different moments of border crossing in *Harriet's House* and *Ana's Shadow*. I then analyze the ways my students reflected upon these moments.

Border crossing in *Harriet's House* and *Ana's Shadow*

Moment 1: Bridging Borders

People who bridge borders work hard to stay connected to two or more communities by moving back and forth between them. In *Harriet's House*, seventeen-year-old Luisa begins border crossing when she tells her adoptive mother Harriet that she has bought a plane ticket to Bogotá, is planning to go there after Christmas, and will stay until she finds out whether or not her birth mother is alive. Anxious for Luisa to go to university in Toronto, Harriet refuses to give Luisa, who is not yet eighteen, permission to go unless she promises she will return to university in the fall. Luisa promises and begins to move back and forth between her adoptive family home in Toronto and the orphanage where she once lived in Bogotá.

While Luisa border crosses by travelling between Canada and Colombia, her younger sister Clare (Harriet's Canadian-born birth daughter) border crosses

linguistically. Clare has made an effort to learn Spanish at school and works hard at sharing what she's learned with Luisa. Knowing how important it is to Luisa to practice speaking Spanish while she is living in Toronto, Clare uses Spanish to connect with her.

Moment 2: Camping on One Side of the Border

Unlike Luisa, Ana isn't emotionally attached to Colombia, doesn't speak Spanish at home, and isn't interested in finding out more about her birth family. In a scene that begins with Luisa and Ana drying the dishes after Luisa's first visit to Bogotá, Luisa tries to persuade Ana to spend the following summer with her in Colombia. Ana refuses.

- LUISA You're going to be curious.
- ANA About what?
- LUISA About how people in Colombia live. What our culture's like, what our music's like.
- ANA *(Puts down the dish/pot she's dried)* I know what Colombian music's like. I've heard it. Lots of times.
(She takes her dishtowel and snaps it against LUISA's backside playfully. It doesn't hurt.)
- LUISA Ow!
(She takes her dishtowel and tries to snap it against ANA's backside, but ANA moves away too quickly. Ana laughs.) There's more to Colombian music than Shakira, you know.
- ANA *(Picks up another pot, still grounded)* I like Shakira.
- LUISA *(Excited)* You need to hear some Reggaetón.
- ANA Shakira sings Reggaetón. *(She begins to sing "Hips Don't Lie" from Shakira's Oral Fixation CD.)*
- LUISA I mean real Reggaetón. *(Puts down the pot she's dried)* I want you to come back with me next summer.
- ANA I already have plans.
- LUISA What plans?
- ANA *(Puts down the pot she's dried and picks up a third one)* I'm going to work at Brian's camp.
- LUISA Brian, Brian, Brian. All I hear about is Brian. *(Beat)* He's the reason you don't speak Spanish anymore. He's the reason you act white.
- ANA You're behind, I've done four, you've done one.
- LUISA *(Picks up a dish/pot)* Three. You've done three. *(Beat)* Don't you want to meet her?
- ANA Who?
- LUISA Our *mamá*.
- ANA *(Puts down the dried pot and picks up another one and waves it in LUISA's face)* I'm way ahead of you. We should get the dishes done before Harriet gets back. Are you going to help?
- LUISA Where is she?
- ANA She's at the doctor. She told you.
- LUISA *(Starts drying again)* We have to find out what happened to her.
- ANA Harriet?

- LUISA No. Our *mamá*.
ANA If you haven't found out by now, she's probably dead.
LUISA But there's no record of her death in our files. The Sisters looked.
ANA So?
LUISA So, there's a chance that she's still alive. And that one day I'll find her and we'll get a chance to meet her.
ANA I don't need to meet her.
LUISA I don't believe you. (*Puts down the pot*) Maybe you look like her.
ANA (*Suddenly angry*) Even if I do look like her, I'd never act like her. Every single thing inside of me comes from living here. In this family. In this country. (*Raises her voice*) If you want to go back to Colombia, go! You want to look for a woman who left us and who is probably dead, go! Go look for her. But I'm staying here.
(*Harriet's House, Scene 6 "Real Mother"*)

In this scene Ana makes it clear that she has chosen to camp with her adoptive family in Canada. While she may decide to spend some time in Colombia with her sister in the future, that time is not now.

Moment 3: Sitting on the Border

After learning that her mother had died of an illness that could have been treated with antibiotics had she lived in Canada, Luisa decides she wants to try to change things for people living in poverty in Bogotá.

People don't have to die of pneumonia. If hadn't she been so poor she would've seen a doctor and gotten antibiotics. And she wouldn't have had to leave her two little girls in an orphanage to be adopted by a family who lived a world away from everything they knew and loved. (*Harriet's House, Scene 10 "Sisters"*)

To fulfill this goal, which reflects a call from adult adoptees for long-term solutions to the problem of children being surrendered for adoption (Trenka, Oparah, & Sun, 2006), Luisa crafts an identity that allows her to sit on the border, rather than simply move back and forth across it. She decides to go to medical school so she can run a health clinic in the Bogotá neighbourhood where she lived until the age of 10.

Importantly, Luisa has the support of her Canadian adoptive family who spends three years raising money to build the clinic in Bogotá. The clinic provides Luisa with a space where she can sit on the border between Canada and Colombia and support people in Bogotá with medical skills and knowledge she acquired in Toronto. The clinic acts as a "third space" (Bhabha, 1994) that allows Luisa to create an identity which makes use of her dual heritage.

Moment 4: Foregrounding and Backgrounding Identities

People who choose to foreground particular social identities and allow others to remain in the background in specific situations or contexts often do so to protect themselves and/or their loved ones. For example, when Harriet decides that her newly-formed lesbian family needs to go to Colombia together to visit Luisa, she

chooses to foreground her identity as an adoptive mother and background her identity as a lesbian, so that the Sisters in the orphanage where Luisa is living will allow the family to visit her. This decision is painful to her partner Marty, who hates having to pretend she isn't lesbian.

HARRIET Ana needs to go back now.

MARTY But she doesn't want to go back.

HARRIET It doesn't matter. Luisa's been gone for seven months. A year and a half altogether. It's time to go visit her.

MARTY What about us? You and me? How will that play out?

HARRIET No one there has to know about us.

MARTY (*Sharp*) What?

HARRIET It'll make things easier.

MARTY For whom? Look, either we're a family or we're not. (*Hurt*) I thought I was part of your family.

HARRIET (*Quick*) Of course you're part of the family. (*Goes over to hug her*) I'm crazy about you, the girls adore you, and I don't know how we would have made it through chemo without you! But we can't be out as a family in Colombia. People won't understand.

MARTY That's their problem.

HARRIET And ours. We can't visit Luisa at the orphanage without the Sisters' permission. They might not give it to us if they know.

MARTY So what do you want? For me to pose as Ana and Clare's "Aunt"? A family friend?

HARRIET (*Sits down on the stool behind the island*) If that's what it takes.

MARTY (*Emphatic*) I hate pretending.

HARRIET I know. What choice do we have?
(*Harriet's House*, Scene 8 "No Regrets")

While choosing to background her identity as a lesbian is strategic and allows Harriet to cross the border between her family life in Toronto and Luisa's life in Bogotá, it comes at a cost for Marty. Border crossing can be painful.

Student Responses to Moments of Border Crossing in *Harriet's House and Ana's Shadow*

Autoethnographic Reflection

In the discussion that follows I examine the ways seven of my students responded to the four moments of border crossing that have just been described. In their reflection assignment, the students were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. Think about a moment in one of the plays that resonated with your own experience. In what ways did it resonate with something in your own life or in the life of someone you know?
2. Think about a moment in one of the plays that provoked an emotional response for you. What was it and why do you think that you responded emotionally to that moment?
3. Think about a moment in one of the plays that you thought was important

for teachers and others who work with youth that live in families like Harriet's family.

4. Which character in the plays did you relate to the most? Why?
5. What are you taking away from the play reading?
6. How have your own views or perspectives changed around one of the issues represented in the play as a result of engaging with the characters' experiences?

The questions I asked my students were designed to provoke autoethnographic writing and reflection. Autoethnography has been described as a form of self-reflective writing that explores a writer's personal experience and connects their autobiographical story to wider cultural, political, and social issues (Ellis, 2004; Maréchal, 2010). While the investigative methods of ethnography and performed ethnography described earlier focus on the beliefs, experiences, and practices of other people, autoethnography focuses on the writer's own beliefs and experiences. I ask my students to respond to their reading of *Harriet's House* and *Ana's Shadow* through autoethnographic writing to support their learning about Other people's families. Like Lisa Delpit (1995), who coined the term "Other people's children," I use the term "Other people's families" here to refer to families who have been marginalized and/or oppressed by their experiences in school.

Student Reflections on Bridging Borders

In their assignments several of my students wrote about the bridging work Clare does to stay connected to her border-crossing sister, Luisa. For example, in the following excerpt, Student 1 makes an argument that Clare's desire to learn and speak Spanish allows her to bridge the linguistic border between herself and her sisters, and assume the role of an intermediary, a role he can personally relate to. Not having had a diasporic border crossing experience of his own, one way Student 1 can see himself bridging borders is by learning another language like Clare.

Think about a moment in one of the plays that you thought was important for teachers and others who work with youth who live in families like Harriet's family.

In the context of developing classroom spaces that are accommodating to racial, cultural and sexual difference, the character of Clare, Harriet's biological daughter, provides a model for anti-oppressive praxis. Given the fact that I am a white, heterosexual male who does not have a diasporic experience, it is with [Clare's] character, particularly her role as an intermediary, that I related most ... Linguistically speaking, although she is only between the ages of 11 and 13 throughout the story, Clare has begun to develop her role as a "border crosser". After returning one day from school, she is anxious to demonstrate her new ability to count to fifty in Spanish... Clare's willingness to learn and implement the marginalized language of her adopted sisters, a language often considered inferior to English in the academic sphere, is a practice from which all teachers can learn. (Assignment by Student 1 December 2011)

Similarly, Student 2 writes:

Clare, their youngest sister, appears to be a symbolic bridge for the widening gulf that is forming between Luisa and the rest of the family. Though not Colombian herself, she sets out to learn to speak Spanish fluently; she wishes to accompany her older sister back to Colombia, and suggests the building of a clinic, which becomes Luisa's *raison d'être*. (Assignment by Student 2, November 2011)

Student 3, who has an adopted sister born in Guatemala, also writes that the character she relates to the most is Clare. In the following excerpt, Student 3 uses her reading of the play to reflect on her own personal experience of learning Spanish and becomes in touch with the feelings of empowerment she experienced from being able to understand what others are saying.

Which character in the plays did you relate to the most?

In *Ana's Shadow*, Clare becomes deeply involved in raising money to help build a medical clinic in Bogotá. She is also learning Spanish so that when she goes to Colombia with Luisa she is able to communicate with the Sisters... In the last two years my family has become very involved with [an orphanage called] El Hogar in Honduras. Just like Clare I have started to learn Spanish so that I can communicate with the kids at the orphanage. There is a feeling of empowerment when learning a new language, knowing that before you didn't understand what others were saying, but now you do. (Assignment by Student 3, November 2011)

Student Reflections on Camping on One Side of the Border

While Students 1, 2 and 3 write about the linguistic border-bridging work Clare does in the play, a number of other students wrote about Ana's desire to camp on the Canadian side of the border.

Which character in the plays did you relate to the most?

Ana's refusal to embrace her Colombian heritage can be related to my rejection of my homosexuality during my youth... Ana's refusal to embrace her heritage can be seen as the product of hegemony...[I]t can be argued that her refusal to ... wear ethnic clothing exemplifies her internationalization of the dominant (white) culture ... Similarly, my own experiences dealing with my sexuality during my early adolescence can be seen as a consequence of hegemony. Growing up, homosexuality was frequently presented (through the media, my peers, or even family members) as a deviant identity...

It is important to note that although Ana's longing to fit in can be understood in the context of hegemony, there are also other possible explanations. For example, Ana was adopted and brought to Canada when she was just seven, while Luisa was ten years old ... it is probable that she has fewer memories of her early childhood in Colombia than Luisa (Assignment by Student 4, November 2011).

In this excerpt, Student 4 sees Ana's desire to camp on the Canadian side of the border as a "refusal to embrace her Colombian heritage." He suggests that this refusal has to do with hegemony, that is, the power of her white middle-class community in Toronto to marginalize her working-class/working-poor community in Bogotá. Then he complicates his argument by suggesting that the fact that Ana was just seven when she came to Canada has given her fewer memories of life in Colombia than Luisa. Ana's desire to camp in Harriet's family in Toronto may have to do with the memories she has built there. Importantly, for the argument I make here, Student 4 relates 14-year old Ana's rejection of life in Colombia to his own rejection of his homosexuality at a similar age. Using the argument of hegemony, which he had originally applied to Ana's "internalization of dominant (white) culture," he sees the way he dealt with his sexuality during early adolescence as a consequence of hegemony. He argues that he internalized the idea that homosexuality was a "deviant identity" and that it was this discourse of deviancy that fuelled his need to pass as heterosexual and camp on the straight side of the border.

While Student 4 analyses what fuels Ana's desire to camp on the Canadian side of the border, Student 3 (who talked about feeling empowered when she began to learn Spanish) writes about the importance of recognizing that while some adopted children want to border cross like Luisa, others choose to camp on just one side like Ana.

What are you taking away from the play readings?

The play has given the opportunity to learn many things ... In scene 5 of *Ana's Shadow* Ana is packing to audition for Canadian Idol. Luisa offers her a shirt that comes from Colombia, but she refuses saying, "I don't want to stand out. I just want to do it my way." Luisa states that being Colombian is what got her noticed in the first place. Ana insists that it is not her difference that got her noticed, but her singing ... Not every adopted child wants to go back to their birth country, and some who do dislike it [will] prefer the country they have been adopted into. (Assignment by Student 3, November 2011)

For Student 5, Ana's insistence on camping on the Canadian side of the border was inspiring and validated his own decisions about where and how to camp.

Think about a moment in one of the plays that resonated with your own experience.

My parents were very persistent in pushing the Indian culture and language upon myself and my brothers. Growing up we were all enrolled in language classes to teach us to learn the language Gujarati. However, learning the language was not the only thing that was taught at the school, there were also strong ties to the Hindu religion and culture associated with the language ... The feeling of being pushed into something was not comfortable for me as it wasn't for Ana. However, what made matters worse was [that] the pressure was coming from people so close it was very hard to avoid conforming. I think it is great that Ana was able to hold true to her person and character throughout the play and be true to herself. This resonates with the way I refuse now to follow the Hindu religious beliefs and rather pursue my own religious beliefs... I created my own culture, which I stood by and behind and that is what made me

who I am. This is what culture is all about; finding and celebrating what defines you as a person separate from the rest of society. (Assignment by Student 5, November 2011)

Student Reflections on Sitting on the Border

Earlier I discussed how building and working in a medical clinic provides Luisa with a space where she can sit on the border between Canada and Colombia. Student 2, who wrote about the way Clare acts like a “symbolic bridge” in her family, offers an interesting analysis of Luisa’s border work:

The character that I most related to was Luisa. She has the need to reach back in order to move forward; her trips to Colombia become *pilgrimages to her Self*. She seeks to piece together the gaps that she feels exist within her consciousness and the journey shapes her personality and informs how she navigates and makes space for herself within the society she is part of. (Assignment by Student 2, November 2011, italics in original)

In this excerpt, Student 2 writes about how Luisa’s movement back and forth across borders in *Harriet’s House* becomes a way for her to craft a new identity for herself three years later in *Ana’s Shadow*. To make a “space for herself within the society she is part of” Luisa not only builds a health clinic in the neighbourhood in which her birth family lived, she begins to make plans to work there once she has finished her medical training in Toronto. Student 2 relates Luisa’s journey of finding a place that allows her to sit on the border to her own journey:

While Luisa’s journey is propelled by seeking a link to her culture, mine was more about making room for my sexual identity. The stubbornness, the willingness to see it through despite possible consequences, is the same. (Assignment 2, November 2011)

Like Student 5 who found Ana’s identity work affirmed the work he had undertaken to create his own culture, Student 2 finds an important connection between her own identity journey and Luisa’s. Interestingly, like Student 4 who relates the initial rejection of his gay sexuality to Ana’s rejection of her Colombian heritage, Student 2 relates her work to make room for her lesbian identity to Luisa’s work to create a space where she can sit on the border between Colombia and Canada.

Student Reflections on Foregrounding and Backgrounding Identities

As discussed earlier, choosing to foreground and background particular identities in different situations and contexts can be challenging and emotionally costly. In the following excerpt, Student 6 writes about her experience of attempting to foreground her South Asian identity in her work as a Don (supervisor) in one of the university’s student residences.

Think about a moment in one of the plays that resonated with your own experience.

There were points throughout both the plays where I felt a strong emotional reaction to what the characters were going through. One of the is-

sues relates to the experience ... where I feel at odds [as] to which identity I have more authority in claiming. When I feel that I am embracing more Western, Canadian traditions than I am Indian-Sri Lankan, I feel that I am betraying my parents and my culture because I am unable to maintain the Indian-Sri Lankan traditions in this environment. Yet, I feel that I would be betraying myself if I were to embody a completely Indian-Sri Lankan traditional viewpoint because it does not reflect how I grew up with a mix of influences and the way I have combined everything to form what I call my “Indian-Sri Lankan-Canadian” perspective. (Assignment by Student 6, November 2011)

Think about a moment in one of the plays that provoked an emotional response for you.

As a Residence Don, I have an amazing opportunity to engage with plethora of international students. There are those who are of South Asian descent who do not intend to be insulting, but when I bring in Indian foods and discuss Bollywood movies, they laugh at my pronunciation because I say the words more like a “Canadian” ... They fail to recognize that growing up in Canada, I have developed an accent that reflects the ones that I hear. I felt betrayed by students who I thought could empathize with this idea of crossing cultures and I had to let them know clearly that since English was my first language, it was difficult for me to repeat the Indian accent and it was not because of the fact that I was at all ashamed of my culture. (Assignment by Student 6, November 2011)

In her assignment Student 6 talks about what happens when she chooses to foreground her Indian-Sri Lankan identity by sharing Indian foods and a discussion of Bollywood movies with international students from South Asia. These students laugh at her Canadian accent. Student 6 finds the laughter insulting and makes sure to tell the students they should not be interpret her accent to mean that she is ashamed of her heritage or that she wishes to demonstrate how Canadian she is. For Student 6, the strategy of foregrounding her Indian-Sri Lankan identity when socializing with international South Asian students is risky. Sometimes she gets laughed at. Yet the strategy of border crossing by foregrounding and background identities is worth the risk as it allows her the opportunity to continue crafting a unique “Indian-Sri Lankan-Canadian” identity and perspective:

What are you taking away from the play readings?

Culture was definitely a source of tension within Harriet’s family, but it is through the tension that each member is able to define and discover their own identity. (Assignment by Student 6, November 2011)

Like Student 6, Student 7 discusses the strategy of foregrounding and backgrounding identities.

Think about a moment in one of the plays that provoked an emotional response for you.

Scene 8, where Marty and Harriet talk about bringing Ana back to Colombia, was one that provoked an emotional response for me ... The tension of being asked to go back into the closet for Marty was one that struck me emotionally because I can relate to how that feels.

In grade 11, before I went abroad to study in England, I hadn't come out to my family or friends yet. However, during this time I did know that I was gay, but just didn't feel comfortable sharing that with my friends and family. I was still in the process of finding myself and the exchange year was a huge learning experience and year of personal growth. The first person that I came out to was in England and it was there I learned about gay culture and participated in a LGBT group in the city I lived in. When I came back, I felt this sense of wanting to come out to everyone but, somehow, I was still reluctant to. I think this was due to the fact that Toronto and Canada is my home and it is not something I can get away with as easily ... in England it was a temporary, 10-month exchange. (Assignment by Student 7, November 2011)

While living temporarily in England allowed Student 7 to come out and camp on the gay side of the border, when he returned back home in Toronto foregrounding his gay identity wasn't something he felt he could do as easily. While the homophobia in Toronto was not very different than the homophobia in England, Toronto was home. Foregrounding his gay identity at home was riskier than foregrounding it away from home.

Conclusion: What I've Learned

By analyzing my students' responses to their reading of *Harriet's House* and *Ana's Shadow* through a framework of border crossing, I have learned that the moments of border crossing portrayed in the plays were significant to students. The plays provided the students with a chance to reflect on the way they themselves have crossed borders in their everyday lives, as well as a chance to reflect on the ways that their border crossing experiences might support their teaching and activist work in education. I have also learned that border crossing characters do not have to embody a particular racial, ethnic, linguistic, or sexual identity in order for my students to relate to them. Students who were working on issues that had to do with their gay and lesbian sexual identities could relate to the identity work Luisa and Ana were doing around their linguistic, cultural, and national identities. What was important was having an opportunity to reflect on how border crossing strategies in the play connected to border crossing work in their own lives. Finally, I've learned that autoethnographic writing allowed my students to cross a border between the ethnographic lives of the characters in the plays and their own lives, and provided them with an opportunity to relate their own experiences to their future work as teachers and educational activists.

In sharing my reflective analysis about my students' responses to *Harriet's House* and *Ana's Shadow*, I hope readers have found something to take away to enhance their own work in equity, activism and education. Perhaps it is the pedagogical power of performed ethnography to raise issues facing marginalized families who are not always well served in North American public schools.² Perhaps it is how useful examples of border crossing can be to students who are crossing different kinds of borders in their own lives. Perhaps it is a desire to (re)read Gloria

² Readers who are interested in working with *Harriet's House* and *Ana's Shadow* in their own classrooms can download the play scripts and accompanying discussion guides for free from T-space, the University of Toronto's Open-Source Research Repository (<https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca>). Click on "author" and then input Goldstein, Tara.

Anzadúla's essays and poetry in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Or perhaps it is a desire to design a reflective study about your own experiences of border crossing and how they have influenced your activist work in education.

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