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The Baptism

Gresilda A. Tilley-Lubbs¹

1) School of Education, Virginia Tech, United States of America.

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The Baptism

Gresilda A. Tilley-Lubbs
Virginia Tech

Abstract

In this performance autoethnography, the author explores her positionality (Davies, 2000; Spry, 2001) in the Spanish-speaking community, moving from her outsider role as an interpreter at the Health Department to her relationships with some of the women and their families to her current position as the grandmother of a Mexican American grandson. She writes as inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) to interrogate her own positionality/power/privilege and to trouble socially constructed borders. She continues to relate her own family to her birth/heart family in the Spanish-speaking community (Tilley-Lubbs, 2012, 2011). By so doing, she realizes that her hybridity is embodied in her grandson and is bounded by her own body (Min-ha, 2010). The performance of her own autoethnographic story (Spry, 2010) presents her as a constant border crosser/straddler who attempts to connect the “autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social” (Ellis, 2004, p. xix).

Keywords: autoethnography, border crossing, power, privilege, Spanish-speaking/Latino/Hispanic

S Spanish-speaking community.
Where my work and my life meet
In a perfect circle
Of love and completeness.

More now than ever before.

Changing positions from interpreter/translator
For family planning and prenatal clinics
To friend/surrogate family of women and their families.

But am I co-opting identity or am I performing the reality of my life?

We support each other:
Advocate/friend/colleague.
Doña Gresilda/Señora Kris/Kris.
All titles of love and respect bestowed by those
Whom I love and about whom I care.

Back to Doña Gresilda—
Does that one set apart—
Define a hierarchical relationship?
Position me as an outsider
In every way—
 Geographic
 Cultural
 Linguistic
 Economic—
To the women and their community?

Trip to Mexico to visit their families.
Welcomed with open arms,
But still a gringa/foreigner.
To them?

Maybe.
 To myself—
 Yes.

Insider-outsider.
 Surrogate grandmother/mother.
 Friend.
 This time, there's no surrogate status.
 This time, I am the grandmother.
 By blood.
 Not just by heart.
 This time, Dan and I
 Witness the baptism of our grandson
 David Isaac Hernández.

Conducted in Spanish,
 Surrounded by Mexican friends/family by heart.
 But this time, our grandson by birth.
 Not just by heart.

So what does surrogate mean?
 Does it mean the gringa who usually
 Co-opts her presence into the community,
 Who now uses her legal-by-marriage,
 Emotional-by-birth
 Positionality
 To assume a position
 That is not hers?

Laura and Emilio are his godparents.
 Laura, our daughter by heart, says:
 Kris, *lo hice por ti*.
 She did it for me.

Causing me to remember that
 We visited her parents
 In Guadalajara, Jalisco.

And
In part,
I did it for her.

This time
My family by birth
Is Mexican.

This time.

The mass in Spanish.
My grandson
Dressed in the silk suit
Of a little French prince
Who once conquered Mexico.
Laura ordered his baptism clothes from Mexico.
Handmade.
Exquisite.
In the style of the French monarchs
Who devastated/used/abused
The Mexican people.
Who were Laura's ancestors,
But whose styles and customs are
Still observed for special occasions,
Such as the baptism
Of my grandson,
Laura's godson.

Kris, *lo hice por ti*.

The baptism party.
My son-in-law David
Cooked the *carne asada a la parilla*
Grilling the beef as his gift of love
To his son
To my grandson
To Laura's godson.

Silvia and Mariana

Visiting Mexican scholar at the university with her daughter.

Silvia/friend/*media naranja*/soulmate/confidant

Accompany us

At the baptism

Hours of conversation.

Eowyn and Kirsten

Daughters by birth

Laura and Lupe

Daughters of the heart.

Silvia and Mariana

Part of this Mexican American family.

All my positions performed

At one celebration--

My grandson's baptism:

Family by birth,

Family by heart,

Family by friendship

With roots in my personal/professional Self.

Memories.

Pieces fitting together.

Summer 2002.

Another baptism for the son of Juana

For whom

I interpreted at the clinic.

Attending the celebration

As outsider/insider.

Welcomed,

But apart.

The baptism party at a local Mexican restaurant.

A band.

Dancing.

David and Eowyn meet.
Life begins to change.

The first step.
As borders start to blur and
My outsider-insider status
Starts to morph into insider-outsider.

Summer 2004.
The engagement
Of David and Eowyn.
The borders blur even more.

Summer 2005.
A trip to Mexico
To set up a study abroad
For my ESL and Spanish teachers.
Universidad de las Américas.
Middleclass.
Safe.
Secure.
Beautiful.
In contrast to the life
Laura and Emilio left behind,
Or that our soon-to-be family lives in Mexico.
More borders blurring.

Daughter Eowyn and son Peter with us.
Already adults.
But one last trip
Before Eowyn marries David
And Peter flies the nest.

Visiting David's family.
Now our family.

David's sister, Maribel.
Dad and Mom.

All continue to grieve the loss of their son
Who crossed the border
To another world.

Nephews,
Nieces,
Brothers and wives,
Sisters and husbands
Come to meet
David's soon-to-be bride
And she to meet her new extended family.
All of us as one family.

The circle widens more.
The borders blur
Although still present.

So many differences.
So many similarities.

Dan doesn't speak Spanish.
David's family doesn't speak English.
But they communicate with eyes and hearts and tears.

Joined in heart.
Families uniting.
Blurring borders:
 Geographic,
 Cultural,
 Linguistic,
 Economic.

My Mexican son-in-law
My US daughter
My Mexican American grandson.

Isaac dedicated in a Protestant service
 In English.
Baptized in a Catholic mass
 In Spanish.
The union
Of two cultures
Two languages.
The permeability of borders.

What are borders?
Who constructs them?
What determines their power?
Where does the privilege lie?
Permeable/impermeable.

White,
Middle class,
Middle aged,
University professor
Always with
Power and
Privilege,
Visible/invisible
But always present.

Insider/outsider
Outsider/insider.

Have I crossed the border
From *gringa*/foreigner
To *miembro de la comunidad*/
Community member?
By no means.

Do I belong in the community
 More than before?
 Maybe.

But for now

Borders
 Crossed/blurred/dissolved/irrelevant
 In one small body and soul.
 My grandson Isaac.

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aGresilda A. Tilley-Lubbs is an Associate Profesor at the School of Education, Virginia Tech, United States of America.

Contact Address: Virgina Tech, School of Education, 300E War Memorial Hall, Blacksburg, VA 24061, United States of America.
Email: glubbs@vt.edu