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## The Baptism

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# The Baptism

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## Abstract

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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).

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

# El Bautizo

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## Resumen

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En esta autoetnografía como performance, la autora explica su posicionalidad (Davis, 2000; Spry, 2001) en la comunidad hispanohablante, moviéndole de su papel de outsider como intérprete al Departamento de Salud Pública hacia sus relaciones con algunas de las mujeres y sus familias a su posición corriente como la abuela de un nieto mexicano americano. Ella escribe como investigación (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) para examinar su propia posicionalidad/poder/privilegio y para interrogar las fronteras construidas por normas sociales. Sigue relacionando a su propia familia a la familia de su nacimiento/corazón en la comunidad hispanohablante (Tilley-Lubbs, 2012, 2011). En hacer esto, se da cuenta de que su hibridad se encarna en su nieto y es limitada por su propio cuerpo (Min-ha, 2010). El performance de su propia historia autoetnográfica (Spry, 2010) la muestra como una persona que constantemente cruza/se extiende sobre la frontera para tentar de conectar lo “autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social” [“autobiográfico y personal con lo cultural y social”] (Ellis, 2004, p. xix).

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**Palabras claves:** autoetnografía, cruzar fronteras, poder, privilegio, hispanohablante/latino/hispano

**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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