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El Huisache Es Pocho, Pero Las Raíces No: Poems

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EL HUISACHE
ES POCHO, PERO
LAS RAÍCES NO: POEMS

A Thesis

by

ISAAC CHAVARRÍA

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Texas-Pan American
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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May 2010

Major Subject: Creative Writing

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ES POCHO, PERO
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May 2010

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ABSTRACT

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This project is a collection of pocho poetry. The poems in my collection emphasize my identity as pocho. The term “pocho” is often used as a derogatory term describing a Mexican American who has lost the ability to speak Spanish. I recontextualize the border pocho as an occupant of two nationalities, as well as several social classes. Along with poets who identify themselves as Chicano/a, I am inspired by family and acquaintances who self identify as Chicano/a, Hispanic, Mexican American, or Mexican. I believe the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas is a unique enclave influenced by its people, landscape, and language. My poetry incorporates family life, growing up in Alton, and talking mocho.

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CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

The works in *El huisache es pocho, pero las raíces no*, a collection of original poems, reflect on three subjects: my family, living in the Rio Grande Valley (“the valley”), and pochismo. I have divided my collection respectively to present the influences within the three areas: Desarraigados (translated as uprooted), Barrio-Colonia, and Mexclado. Throughout my poetry I also refer to the pocho, a term I use to describe the sum of my experiences and my own identity. The literal translations of pocho include “overripe” and “spoiled fruit.” In reference to a person, pochos “were perceived to have been *agringado/as* or contaminated by *gringo* or ‘American’ cultural values and the English language” (Allatson 192). However, being raised in the valley I feel this definition is inadequate to my experience because it does not focus on the more positive and balanced image of pocho that I identify with.

Pocho is not used to describe trees or inanimate objects, but here I would like to refer to the huisache tree (*Acacia farnesiana*) as pocho because I associate the huisache with valley life. The characteristics of the huisache remind me of valley people: originating from Mexico and having the ability to survive in drought conditions and harsh soil. The exact origins of the huisache and some valley residents are difficult to determine, sometimes from ignorance, selective memory, or undocumented family histories. My appreciation of the huisache, however, has been gradual. When I bought property in Alton and was deciding which trees to clear or keep, I uprooted three mesquite trees. Only the immense size of one mesquite and huisache tree in the backyard

kept them from being uprooted. Throughout the seven years I lived in that area I used mesquite as leña for cookouts, and the huisache became my ornamental tree because of the fragrant, yellow flowers. After moving out, I realized I missed pruning the trees and simply relaxing under their shade. At this time I also understood cutting the three mesquite trees was also denying the importance of my heritage. In relation to the title *El huisache es pocho, pero las raíces no*, I consider myself the huisache, grounded in valley life. My parents are the raíces, whom I do not consider pocho, and are my connection to mis tierras: la frontera de Mexico, los Estados Unidos, y Tejas.

I have not always been certain about my identity. In my response to a *Monitor* reporter in the article “Latino? Hispanic? It all depends on whom you ask,” I answered a question on identity and what I would call myself by responding, “I’m Hispanic[...]My parents are Mexicans. But it doesn’t offend me if people call me something else” (qtd. in Roebuck). My reaction showed indifference at identifying myself. The term “Hispanic” was the most encompassing of my experiences. I recognized Hispanic as a term including a range of ethnicities, but living in the valley, I feel desensitized by ethnic terms and their context outside the educational setting. At home my mother called my brother “mi prieto” because of his dark skin color, but used it affectionately, rather than as an insult. In my mindset, I substituted Hispanic with Mexican American because the bulk of the population in the valley is of Mexican heritage. I do not remember being called pocho, but after thinking in more depth about my identity I wanted a more expressive term for me than all the others used to describe Latinos. Pocho is often considered a derogatory term, but for me it connects the identities of Mexicano, Chicano, Hispanic, as well as others. Prior to forming my own pocho identity my writing

influences were Anglo writers because the public school education system did not include Latino literature in the curriculum.

My writing was initially influenced by William Blake, Edgar Allen Poe, and Stephen Crane, and their use of rhythm, dark tones, and poetic devices. Crane in particular fascinated me with his piece “In the desert.” The poem’s forty nine words gave me an appreciation of precision and metaphor, which I later valued in my own writing. Crane and these authors were part of the public school curriculum and more accessible to teachers who then taught us this material. More recently, my influences include local writers and Chicano/a writers, which I will explain in further detail.

Desarraigados

Desarraigados translates as uprooted, and in my poetry my parents, grandmother, and friends fall under this category. In early Chicano literature, including *Pocho* (1959) by Jose Antonio Villarreal and *Barrio Boy* (1971) by Ernesto Galarza, the Mexicanos who migrated to the United States were referred to as *pochos* by Mexicanos living in Mexico.

In *Barrio Boy*, the character Ernie gives a typical account of a *pocho* experience in California: The narrator states, “Turning *pocho* was a half-step toward turning American. And America was all around us, in and out of the [Sacramento] *barrio*. Abruptly we had to forget the ways of shopping in a *mercado* and learn those of shopping in a corner grocery or in a department store” (Galarza 207). In this paragraph, along with the rest of *Barrio Boy*, the characters feel a loss of identity as they move from being Mexican to *pocho*. Part of feeling “less” Mexican was the separation from their homes

and culture in attempting to adjust to the U.S lifestyle. Not all immigrants face similar geographic separation from Mexico or the same adjustments.

Although my parents also immigrated to the U.S., I don't consider them *pochos* because they frequently visited family along the Mexican frontera, and settled in the U.S in their late 20's approximately in 1969. At this point, my parents have lived in the U.S for approximately 40 years. Despite this length of time my parents can still be considered uprooted because as immigrants, they did not immediately settle in the valley, and spent some time in Iowa and northern states to work as laborers. My father's life here did not deter him from visiting his family and yearning to return to Mexico. I consider people with families in Mexico uprooted because their lives still revolve around the events in Mexico. As with the current violence along the Mexican side of the frontera, many Mexican Americans and Mexicanos are unable to return, heightening the feeling of being uprooted. This uprooted feeling begins with migration.

In the early 70s my parents trekked to Iowa searching for work. For migrants to northern states, these nomadic treks create hardships, but also many memories they pass on to their children, which I pay homage to in "Regresando from the Midwest":

Reflecting, at the moment, my mom says. "lo bueno es que lo
encontramos" between the hidden context of male dominance
migrant story, cross
cultural story, she
narrows it
down to
tuercas
en una
llanta
chueca. (36)

The issues of poverty, gender roles, and travel make the journey difficult for the group, but more so for a woman. My mother does not directly confront these subjects while

telling me her stories, and instead uses these and similar incidents as allegories. I continue to be interested in the stories my mother has not told me.

In some cases the *desarraigados*, along with *pochos*, are represented unflatteringly in the Mexican media and literature. In the play *Los Desarraigados*, Mexican author Jose Humberto Robles uses the *pocho* family to critique the *pocho* and their perceived faults. His typical *pocho* family includes parents originally from Mexico and U.S. born children, living in Corpus Christi, TX. The children are represented as deviant *pochos*, talking back to parents, “What a hell are you bitching about?” (104), staying out late, and someone who has problems with the law and alcohol. The play represents the parents as easily influenced by the American culture. They begin using corrupted Spanish like “pos” and “dejates”, after only living in the U.S. for a few years. They are also represented as over-working for the “American” dream. In comparison, my parents and my friends’ parents have lived in the U.S. for many years and do not speak like Robles’ characters. Robles’ *pocho* characters unsuccessfully attempt to blend in as Americans and simultaneously alienate themselves from Mexicans. The character Joe, a distressed *pocho*, vents his frustration saying “Porque aquí nunca pasaremos de ser unos *¡greasers!*...y porque allá siempre [sic] seremos unos *pochos*...” (133). I do not value the reaction by Joe because the play disregards possible interactions between the *pocho* family and other Latino members of the community. When my parents moved to the U.S., for example, *compadres* and *comadres* helped with their transition.

I reject Robles’ portrayal of a deviant *pocho* whose family is in turmoil as a result of being uprooted. In my thesis, I focus on my experience of *pocho* shaped by my life, which includes positive reflection of my relatives, as in “Abuelita”:

Our grandmother
 talks about
 clipping mesquite
 seeds
 sucking sweet
 green
 to pass time. (35)

The figure in this poem is a composite of my grandmother and mother. The images are based on stories from my mother's childhood. With my mother's stories, I have found a connection through the oral tradition of storytelling. The details in my mother's stories remind me of the similarities of the valley to her childhood ranchito. The parents in *Los Desarraigados* have an eternal longing to return to Mexico, even after so many years. My mother, and likely many other immigrants, realized they settled in the United States and have not returned to Mexico for reasons of opportunity. The play seems to imply that the opportunity of moving to the U.S. does not merit the loss of culture resulting from leaving Mexico. Not all immigrants have lost their culture to the extent of the characters in Robles' play.

The use of roots in *El huisache es pocho, pero las raíces no* is not a reference to indigenous pre-colonial roots. In this aspect, my poetry is unlike Francisco X. Alarcón's *Snake Poems*, works largely inspired by the Nahuatl language, and a mixture of probable Aztec roots. Stylistically, my writing has similarities to Alarcón's use of sparse words and metaphoric poems. For my work, I rely on the roots of a pocho family which can be indistinct, as in the time I asked my mother for her family's history, and she could only name the ranchito she grew up in. My own roots are based on my family life in Alton and my parents who moved to the valley approximately 40 years ago.

During their first years in the U.S, my parents searched for occupations which suited the lifestyle they wanted for their children. During the early 70s my father worked in Iowa for the chicken factories, then worked in Pharr, TX in the orange fields for three years. My father finally settled into work as a bricklayer, which became his permanent work. Living in the valley, I encounter other people whom I consider uprooted. They are found often in local parks and gather at the nearby Salvation Army where the men stand and wait for work. Even if they have moved by choice (from necessity), I sense feelings of resentment against Americans, including Mexican Americans. In “blank,” I use a confrontation to describe the anger of a transient Mexicano:

on the curb of salvation
 army, me pides una peseta
 “¿de donde eres?”
de allá. te doy la peseta. (37)

Even though I attempted to make conversation, he did not take my curiosity well and answered me by saying “allá.” In response, his hostility angered me because I was treated as unworthy of an answer.

But I also understand the hostility from this man. As was often the case prior to the Chicano/a Movement, Mexicanos and Mexican Americans were forbidden to speak Spanish at school (including schools in the valley), segregated, and given fewer rights. Gloria Anzaldúa describes being caught speaking Spanish during recess and being punished by being hit on her knuckles with a ruler (75). Although 90 percent of the valley is comprised of people of Mexican descent, obstacles existed. The majority does not always have the power within the community. Even U.S. citizens of Mexican descent have felt uprooted by programs like Operation Wetback in the 1950s, made to feel as if their home was elsewhere and their native language was inappropriate. In “Un poco de

you,” I recount my mother-in-law’s story of not being allowed to speak Spanish and the way it changed the upbringing of her children:

and los malos have won, because tu hija can speak Spanish at school now, but when she speaks, it’s crooked, unlike everybody else’s. and now she dislikes those who speak Spanish because she feels alienated. (38)

The character in “Un poco de you” and the man from “blank” are distrustful of persons of their own culture because they have been betrayed through alienation and enforcement of malicious rules. In “blank” I felt I was spoken to with hostility because I was attempting to find out information about his journey. Perhaps in his eyes I was just a pocho questioning un Mexicano, treating him like a curiosity. And even though public school rules against Spanish speakers have eased up in the past decade, there are still instances in which speaking Spanish is deemed punishable. Persons of Mexican descent in the general public have felt singled out as well. Arizona Senate Bill 1070 has been criticized as directly targeting Mexican immigrants by requiring Arizona residents to carry proper immigration documents. Rules against Spanish speaking students and laws targeting Latino/as and Mexicans alike contribute to the feeling of being uprooted from a home and language.

In this collection, I reflect on my life growing up in a fairly stable family as the fourth of sixth children. I also reflect on my friend Melissa’s life. Her family instability and her role as an eldest sibling created a more demanding experience for her as a pocha. For Melissa, her elementary years instilled a stronger value of education compared to her mother who felt work was more important. Melissa valued education, but her family responsibilities kept her cooking for the men in the fields and living in the housing

developments until her eventual “escape.” Given the choice to define herself as pocha or Chicana, she responded with the term pocha:

[sic]: i feel it bc no matter how educated one gets ill always have to talk the way those in ir fam who education communicate. Sometimes ur smarter when u talk mocho talk. Im both mexican n american. When i act american i feel like im a wanna be n vice versa. I can't be true to just one.

(Isaac Chavarría Interview with Melissa Suarez)

Her response to family and societal expectations reveals how a pocha cannot be true to just one culture. Within the pocha/o, cultural differences are natural, including words like “mocho” and other jargon.

Growing up I wasn't as familiar with the idea of being pocho as I was with the idea of speaking mocho. Mocho is a term used to define the act of “cutting off” or speaking Spanish in a similar manner with incorrect words and an accent. Mocho is used as a specific reference to language, as in Jose Antonio Burciaga's line in the poem “Al otro lado de la linea” where he mentions “hijos con el *Spanish* mocho.” For example, Melissa counters the idea of speaking “mocho” with the idea of speaking “educated” English. To Melissa's family, her educational advancement alienates her family members. Melissa's family feels uncomfortable with her accomplishment, believing she has a “better than you” attitude since she is the first to attend college.

Along with her family's alienation, a character based on Melissa rejects a culture which stifles sexuality in my poem “Loaded”:

on a mattress
drunk passion
gasps for romance
and relishes

a familiarity
of burning
the body (39).

Like other aspects of her life, she hopes to find consistency in work and with family.

Sometimes her escape from the turmoil is her search for love, which has taken her through many short-term relationships. She finds a satisfaction in her escapes, but ultimately wants to find the one person to settle with.

Barrio-Colonia

My introduction to Chicano/a literature was in elementary school. I read *Stories that Must not Die* by Juan Savageau, a collection of traditional Mexican folk stories. Ironically, books on Chinese and Russian culture were easier to find and more numerous at the public library in the valley, but Savageau's book compiled folk stories that I was already familiar with. Reading the folk stories made me interested in cultural texts, but it wasn't until I graduated from high school that I was introduced to more Chicano/a writing. Working with a student organization at South Texas College aimed at helping student writers publish their works, I reviewed numerous local writers talking about their Aztec roots, scientific Chicano/a ideas, and valley love. It was not until graduate school that I began to read prominent authors from the Rio Grande Valley: Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), Rolando Hinojosa's *Estampas del Valle y otras obras* (1973), and Americo Paredes' *With His Pistol in His Hand* (1958). Reading their works furthered my interest in Mexican culture and the rancho and urban lifestyles of the characters. The readings inspired me to reflect on my childhood and teen years and the new opportunities and obstacles of Chicano/as in the present day. Reading authors using

the valley as a setting contributed to my appreciation of valley life as unique and as a factor in my personal development.

The poems in the Barrio-Colonia section and in other areas of the collection emulate the writing of Chicano/a writers by focusing on my hometown Alton, TX to create a more representative portrayal of my experience in the valley. In my poems I use the terms “barrio” and “colonia” because Alton is a mixture of both. The lack of services provided by the city and the large number of new immigrants living in underdeveloped homes define Alton as comprised of colonias. Mi barrio is more developed and receives city services, but still has higher instances of crime and poverty than higher income areas in the region. In certain instances it is difficult to distinguish the barrio from the colonia, with some areas of Alton being a combination of underdeveloped housing in neighborhoods with city services.

In writing poems about locality in relationship to my work, I have found similarities to Tino Villanueva, Jose Montalvo, and Evangelina Vigil-Piñón, authors raised in enclaves in Tejas comprised of Mexicanos and Chicano/as. I am inspired by their poetry because every-day occurrences are present in their poems, such as a pocho “tradition” of the flea market. In “La Pulga,” Jose Montalvo describes a mixture of undocumented workers, ex-convicts, and Chicano/as as comprising his locality: “La Raza / really get[s] down / and get[s] away / from it all” (54). In my version of the pulga poem titled, “In Alton tambien,” I want to include more of the emotion which Montalvo seems to refer to:

shifting between
expired merchandise
and damaged goods

a plastic horse missing a leg
 Jorge con su cojera
 Barbie, minus su ropa
 y Rita, too dark

for a good lay (56).

In my poem, as I imagine in Montalvo's, shoppers go to la pulga for the inexpensive products, but sometimes for just a walk or to rummage.

Images I associate with the valley are part of my poetry; they are images I see less often in northern Texas cities like Austin and Houston. The valley landscape is full of elaborate crosses that mark roadside deaths, and in my poem "las cruces," they are reminders of loved ones:

wooden markers
 grounded in
 caliche y coronas
 de cristo (74).

My portrayal of the valley is meant to include its multiple aspects. My poems focus on a place that the national media often refers to in debates about health issues, immigration, drug trafficking, and poverty. My poetry therefore informs persons not familiar with the conditions, obstacles, and benefits of living in the valley. I want to inform the reader about misconceptions about the pocho culture in the same manner José Antonio Burciaga in "In Defense of the Jalapeño and Other Chiles," defends peppers from a study which determined them to be carcinogenic. I believe his intent is showing how the media and research represents Chicano/as and other ethnicities with bias. If it's not a jalapeño causing cancer, then it's a report on tortillas as a probable cause of birth defects ("Ottawa") or the existence of lead in Mexican dulces (don't judge *all* dulces by one story). The tortillas and dulces are part of the pocho's experience, an experience

which is often depicted by the media through blanket statements and construed as third-world. As with Burciaga's commentary on the misconception of Mexican cuisine, the barrio is also misconstrued as a dangerous place that does not have much cultural worth to offer. In "esas dos millas," I focus on the forgotten aspects of living in a barrio:

my boundary es la calle
del taco –
la esquina donde ese señor
vende sandías
[sin semillas]
and the pavement
leads to caliche. (59)

Even though this poem conveys that the conditions for residents are not the best, I want to display in my poetry an atmosphere of contentment. Even in a small town like Alton, on the cusp of having almost 4,000 official residents, the types of residents vary. In "boom town," I describe residents attempting to get out of poverty, but who are only able to slightly move up the economic ladder:

for the goal, the entity, that first
class ride to upper lower
class, from the poverty
WIC lines and grabbing of
indigenous alien
cracker barrel philosophy. (52)

This poem is a proclamation of people who have been without the necessary amenities for so long, and have created a lifestyle where they manage to get by.

As other poets have done, I focus on particular landmarks of my hometown, as in "sylvia vela park," the largest park in Alton and a meeting ground for all sorts of personalities:

[sylvia vela park]

is for gorditos
 caminando
 cada día
 la güera con su hijo
 kids that come over
 if you stand with
 a basketball
 they wait
 for the rebound
 like alley cats. (57)

Here, I want to create an image which is universal, even though I am referring to a specific park. Images like “basketball” and “kids” include any park, but I also use “gorditos” and “güera” to connect with Mexican culture. I want to represent Sylvia Vela park as a combination of American and Mexican customs. This poetic tradition of home is also in Evangelina Vigil-Piñón’s work *Thirty an’ Seen a Lot* and in the poem “la gente de Hondo.” Vigil-Piñón’s poem is an account of a Sunday filled with pedasitos of Chicano/a culture and music which could take place in any town. Her poem is distinctive as a description of a common event experienced by overlooked people. My poem “sylvia vela park” likewise aims to capture a day in the park filled with overlooked residents.

My poetry is also influenced by popular music in the valley, including Norteño, Banda, Tejano, Huapango, among others. In particular, Rigo Tovar’s cumbia “Mi Querido Matamoros” has inspired me to incorporate valley references by many well-known valley musicians in my poetry. Similar to the way poetry can validate a person’s experience, my own work has legitimized my life in the Rio Grande Valley, as Tovar does for his Matamoros in (“Mi Querido Matamoros” 1971):

A orillas del río bravo hay una linda región
 Con un pueblito que llevo muy dentro del corazón
 Mi matamoros querido (nunca te podré olvidar)
 Mi matamoros del alma (nunca te podré olvidar)
 Y nacé sobre tu suelo (nunca te podré olvidar)

Y me crié sobre tus playas (nunca te podré olvidar)

Tovar's song validates the worth of local areas along the border. In my poetry I want the attention to be on events usually associated with the working class. For instance, weekend dances at a local flea market in the city of San Juan are the focus of my poem "Querida Valle":

en la pulga de San Juan
con las señoras maduras
vigilando las jóvenes

y no nos vamos
hasta que ahogamos
las penas (61).

When I reflect on the flea market dances I consider them common gatherings, but they also are shunned by middle and upper class valley residents because of the venue of the flea market. I write about these bailes because I do not want to shun them. In writing about them, I hope to comment on their importance to valley culture.

Living in a barrio-colonia makes me a mixture of the English and Spanish language, and my poems often reflect this linguistic mixture. In the bailes and la pulga, Spanish is the dominant language spoken by the patrons and vendors. Using Spanish, sometimes for the entirety of the poem, helps me maintain the authenticity of my observations. When I observe the community of my barrio-colonia, the residents speak Spanish, sometimes mocho, and I begin to write as if in their own words. I write in Spanish because to a certain extent I cannot as easily capture a "Mexican" experience with English. My selection of languages also influences poems dealing with a pocho upbringing.

Part of the pocho experience is familiarity with Mexican and European cultural icons, as with the lechuza and little red riding hood. I have taken the principles of both stories, and the lesson of the dangers in the real world, attempting to live within the boundaries of both the Mexican and American, in my poem “Un mix de historia”:

cuidado, little red
riding hood.
do not dance
with the handsome stranger
do not steal
your neighbor's husband. (45)

Within the poem, I also make reference to the story of the devil that goes to the bailes and the warnings of the dangers of promiscuity, especially for women. These warnings from traditional and modern viewpoints are not about health, but about a tainted image and self-respect. I believe the warnings are misguided, and place blame on women, while excluding men. However, in the poem I use the viewpoint of a community which often deems a repressed woman as a “good” woman to portray that this mindset still exists.

The barrio-colonia section also focuses on community, and as a result, it avoids placing emphasis directly on myself. My neighborhood is one starting point in shaping my personality and beliefs. Developing an honest observation of my life started with my observations of poverty as represented in my poems “boom town” and personalities in “sylvia vela park.” Observing my community members has led me to the realization that I am not so different.

Mexclado

The section Mexclado refers to the fusion of two influences: my observations of desarraigados and the valley. This combination of portraying people living together in

the valley but who do not feel a sense of belonging has also developed my personality and opinions.

To symbolize mexclado, I use the huisache because like a pocho it does have origins in Mexico and is abundant along this border. I use the huisache to represent protection of literal and metaphoric forms, as referenced in my poem “igualito,” where

La familia-
 menos tu
 se amontona
 cradled by untrimmed huisache branches
 near oil stains
 where an old Chevy stood (30).

The huisache is a protection from the sun and elements, acting as a barrier to the strong winds in the valley. The huisache also gives me security based on familiarity from growing up among those trees and spending time with my mom in her backyard garden, which includes plants native to her ranchito.

In my other poem “roots,” I was inspired by my sister having a huisache cut down, along with criticism of Mexican Americans and immigrants taking over the United States. The huisache is a symbol of strength, but also vulnerable in “roots,” where I tell a general audience:

When cutting
 south texas
 huisache,
 a tar-
 covered stump
 eliminates
 buried, hacked
 and chopped ancestors
 from returning as
 hungry offshoots. (73)

Immigrants within the U.S. and those arriving are being cut off from U.S. society. They are equally deprived from returning to their homeland. This same group of immigrants is the basis for criticism from the national and local media portraying the border as a danger zone. This leads to reactions like those of Texas Governor Rick Perry's legislation: Operation Rio Grande, Operation Wrangler, and recently the Texas' Spillover Violence Contingency Plan, which attempts to protect the border with disregard to (and misconceptions of) valley locals and new immigrants. Valley people resist through protest and creation of art and prose in hopes of fixing the image of their home, but many remain silent as well. Similarly, in "roots" I compare the act of trying to kill off a *huisache* to a society attempting to limit the growth of *pochos*, *Chicanos*, *y los demas*, which is a lot of hard work.

The section "Mexclado" includes the influences of the Mexican and North American cultures. I do not consider myself an assimilated person that creates an identity excluding my Mexican and valley upbringing. I have loyalties to both Mexican and regional ideals. It is a back and forth between living within and reacting to the North American and Mexican cultures. I express this idea in "comezón":

consume mi
 piel café
 my sangre
 de mex
i is yo
can es puede. (67)

Code switching, like feeling *pocho*, is normal to me and many valley residents. In my speech and poems, I use various *lenguas* learned growing up along the border. Sometimes this combination of languages is referred to as *tex-mex*, *spanlish*, and

mocho. The concept of code switching mirrors the similarities of the words and my feelings: consume/consuma, mi/my, i/yo, can/puede. For example, in Gloria Anzaldúa's poem "sus plumas el viento," Anzaldúa includes a subtle and selective use of code switching, usually short phrasing, and dichos: "She stares at her hands / *Manos hichadas, quebradas,* / thick and calloused like a man's" (139). Anzaldúa's italics and use of a glossary at the end of "To live in the Borderlands means you" facilitates the reading by a non-Spanish speaker: "To survive the Borderlands, you must live *sin fronteras* / be a crossroads" (217). The italics, beyond signaling Spanish text, add emphasis and metaphoric value to her words. Translations of Spanish text helps introduce new audiences and does not alienate the audience. By using *sin fronteras*, Anzaldúa accentuates the meaning of the phrase and completes the significance by defining it for the reader. In my poems, I do not define Spanish words in order to reduce interruptions, and mimic the flow of Spanglish and other combinations of the English and Spanish language. It is important for me to keep the Spanish words without translation because those are the original words and phrases I thought of when writing. I refrain from editing my mexclado poems to accommodate monolingual speakers of either language. With translations it is difficult to perfectly substitute certain words and sayings. I prefer keeping the original text without removing or changing my original intentions.

My poems seek to suggest that Spanish can seamlessly replace English, as Raúl Salinas does in "un trip through the mind jail": "Did only Mexicans have cooties in their hair? / ¡Que gacho!" Salinas' slang expresses a genuine response in one of his languages, as I also attempt to express in "un frontera pocho en San Antonio":

Un wetback en San Antonio
me preguntó, *me tomas una foto?*

I search my vocabulary,
 pero the easiest thing to say
 es que *si*. (75)

Here, I represent two subtle differences in the language of the pocho who has both the ability to think in Spanish and speak in Spanish. The words being attempted to be spoken may be known, but when placing the tongue in the appropriate place to create the correct sounds, there is failure. I could use “es que” which represents a thought process in Spanish, but the result is a rather simple “*si*”. For many pochos, meeting someone fluent in Spanish creates nervousness about communicating, and sometimes it is shame for not knowing the Spanish language better. On the other hand, when speaking to my mother, even if she is a fluent Spanish speaker, I do not feel nervous. This feeling represents itself in my completely Spanish poems, which directly talk to more familiar audiences.

With my poems, I assert that ambiguity is part of my identity. For example, in the poem “Being a non-believer and Mexican-American means,” I say:

for a non-believer
 la Virgen de Guadalupe
 will never appear [...]

to be godless
 almost means
 not being Chicano (86).

Although my family is Catholic, my own religious beliefs counter those commonly associated with the Mexican culture. Being agnostic (at this point) separates me from the beliefs of the church and folk healing. The two are in opposition but both serve the community, as they once did for my household. While I was growing up, my father was receptive to sobadores, while my mother held her belief with the church. Today I do not participate in either, but acknowledge their cultural influence in my life.

I associate closely with the “Mexican” ideals of family and nationalistic pride while also having pride in being American. However, I experience feelings of uncertainty and allegiances arise when crossing a checkpoint, whether on the frontera or in Falfurrias as in “No Se Terminan”:

a border patrol station
 in Falfurrias
 every trip we answer
 “Yes, sir” to
Are you a U.S citizen?
 Alton, Mission, Rio Grande Valley
 las tierras desgraciadas, to
Where are you coming from? (74).

This poem reflects my uneasiness with the border patrol agents who may not believe my response that I am a U.S citizen. This poem is inspired by one of my previous trips north with my older, darker brother who was pulled aside and had his vehicle searched. The poem reflects my feelings of being an outcast in an area where I should be welcomed. In my poem, italics represent my confusion towards the border patrol agent’s question. I label their questions in English as a “foreign language” with italics in the same way Spanish is often italicized to signal a “foreign language” in an English text.

Living in the valley has given me a unique perspective on terms often used to refer to Mexican Americans, such as “coconut” and “mojo.” This collection of poems places much emphasis on my regional upbringing in the valley and it asserts that I consider myself more pocho than Chicano, and more pocho than Mexican American. Being pocho is more common in this border region because contact with Mexicanos occurs often and there is a tendency to compare “each other” (the different groups of Mexicanos). In fact, the term pocho is effective in producing shame/guilt when used by Mexicanos (rather than non-Mexicans) who chastise Mexican Americans or Mexicanos

for allowing American culture to influence their identity. The guilt comes from the stereotype that a person has moved from a historically rich Mexican culture, to the current mainstream American culture which has been oppressive and relatively short in comparison. In my poem “Tomate,” for instance, I use the analogy of a salad to describe the variety of people living in the valley, all with some Mexican origins, but still unwilling to accept each other as equals:

bolillos, cafesitos, tanned y todos
odian uno al otro porque unos parecen muy nacos
otros fresas, es como una ensalada where cherry
tomatoes envy the fall aesthetic of heirloom tomatoes. (79)

It may seem that Mexican heritage would create cohesiveness among the group, but “Tomate” reveals class divisions. The most distinct divisions relate to wealth and education. Persons referred to as fresas have high incomes, are from a Mexican metropolitan area, and are well educated. Naco refers to persons who are poor and have a lower education. The terms fresas and nacos, in my experience, are not used towards persons of other cultures. I do not use these terms to create further separation, but I feel it is important to note that within Mexicanos and Mexican Americans, there is the consciousness of difference created by social factors.

I first had a feeling of “pochoness” entering a hierberia as I attempted to do research for a graduate course. I meant to find if the influx of South American immigrants created a demand for specific types of folk medicines. Although I was fairly familiar with Mexican folk medicine and some of the products, it wasn’t enough. It wasn’t enough either that I am from the valley, bilingual, and attempted to show confidence. The regular hierberia customers were fluid between veladoras and statues, while I browsed without a purpose. In the hierberia I felt uncomfortable because I can’t

pick out candles for the right occasion as they do. Perhaps they have grown up practicing folk medicine frequently, but only on occasion did I hear about my father visiting a sobador or drinking liquados of savila (aloe). In “esa curandera” I describe a cleansing process:

place a red cloth
sobre mi cuerpo
read the dark
lines of my life
y cura
la manera de mi amor.

dame poder
to deflect gritos
de puto e infidel. (65)

The curandero can heal the unhealthy emotions from “la manera de mi amor.” I have seen love take violent forms, and curanderos witness lovers attempting to break marriages or salvage unhealthy relationships. My contact with curanderos and folk healing has been indirect, but I still feel the effect of their work as they cure the people I am close to. The indirect contact with curanderos and other forms of folk healing makes me semi-knowledgeable and adds to my pochoness.

In considering the different identities of persons who have migrated from Mexico to the U.S, I have written on several reincarnations of the pocho spirit. The poem “Hijo de tu” describes generations: a son of a person who immigrated to the United States, was once a pachuco in the 1950’s, then the cholo around the 1980’s, y ahora el pocho:

es un vato
mandando su hijo
a la chingada,
the land of
brown bag lunches. (71)

These symbols depict the resistance to complete assimilation to U.S culture, and simultaneously represent a distancing from the Mexican culture. The pocho is another figure of continued resistance and separation. A pocho of the past might not seem the ideal person to resist the lifestyle of the U.S., but I consider the pocho of the present, through my language and my ease living on the border (awkwardly portrayed as dangerous by media) as a rebellion against the “American Dream” ideals of wealth and assimilation into the dominant culture. Many of my poems reflect a working class pocho, whom I believe maintains a better understanding of his/her community dynamics.

Pocho refers to language, but also to the culture of the individual. My inability to speak clear Spanish when talking to my mother or natives of Mexico is speaking “mocho.” I do not feel as judged by my mother for my mocho mistakes, as I would when conversing with people I just met. To know that my culture is different from other Mexicanos living in the homeland to the south, or east and west, I know I am pocho. I refer to “un frontera pocho en San Antonio” as an allusion to displacement felt in an unknown city:

dónde está the no
license, fly by noche
taquerías, tex-mex buffet
piratas hawked by
chicas en
mini-faldas. (82)

The poem reflects the culture shock experienced by my brother Noe, who recently began attending UT-San Antonio, and realized not everyone goes to the pulga to buy damaged goods or enjoys eating at authentic Mexican taquerías. The culture in San Antonio and

the valley is similar but unique, and the separation from home can cause an unfamiliar awkwardness.

The poems of Mexclado reflect no singular identity. I realize the difficulty of most *pochos* being accepted in a Mexican society as in “Pocho Questions”:

why can't I roll my r's when Andrea la güera can? [...]
 how do i sound when i speak español? [...]
 si me voy, can i come back? (87).

¡Ya!

A collective singular identity does not exist for the *pochos*, but I aspire for the term *pochos* to bring cohesion, like the terms Chicano/a and Mexican American. I do not consider Chicano/a and Mexican American as equivalents because “Chicano/a” implies a political association with the efforts of the Chicano/a movement. On the other hand, “Mexican American” alludes to an identity neither Mexican nor American.

A *tejano* *pochos* is validated by contributions to the Texas-Mexican border, mainly the *pochos* languages of tex-mex, spanglish, and *tejano*, and the advancement of the mother culture. The terms *pachucho/a*, *cholo/a*, and Chicano/a are some terms used to depict the various Mexican descendants in the U.S. Yet, the term *pochos* is still gaining scholarly respect and I aim to increase its validity. *Pochos* encompasses my strengths and flaws: I realize my Spanish is not perfect, but for the region it serves me well. As a *pochos*, I have been witness to homesickness, abusive relationships, and family struggles, but I also have access to the music, geography, and knowledge my parents and predecessors contributed to. I use the setting of the Rio Grande Valle to differentiate *pochos* in the valley from elsewhere.

I consider the following as future forms of the pocho: Pocho Americanizado: no recollection of previous Mexican descent; Frontera Pocho: not necessarily expert in matters Mexican [or American], but articulate in both; Pocho Chicanito/a: uno que esta developing Chicano ideals, and Nuevo Pocho: just crossed over, still getting used to the nuances of U.S. These different pocho identities exist, but are yet not recognized as relevant cultural identities like the Chicano/a. Do these forms of pocho create more divisions? I believe they allow people who consider themselves Hispanics an opportunity to redefine themselves and create new definitions that fit their particular pocho experience, while inviting Chicano/as (y otros) to rethink their counterparts.

Maybe in the future we can use “mocho” as a term to describe children of pochos, as it is for my nephews who understand Spanish, but don’t speak it that well and are more so Americanized than I am. In the meanwhile, through my poems, I attempt a reconstruction of my pocho identity by finally taking a look at my own life, using my poems to explore the family and home de mi frontera, which I have failed to fully appreciate in the past.

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DESARRAIGADOS

en enero

el clima dice
calienta el tlalpeño
y saca las cobijas

igualito

i can't remember your eyes,
 brown i believe.
 but i recall Strawberry
 and those Mets on TV,
 exhales,
 falling asleep shirtless.

on Sundays after mass in San Martín
 your curses tearing at a motionless Chevy
 sending tubing and sparkplugs
 into my stomach

15 years later
 i'm cooled by a window unit
 rushing through
 beady Budweisers.

La familia-
 menos tu
 se amontona
 cradled by untrimmed huisache branches
 near oil stains
 where an old Chevy stood.

¿a dónde te fuiste?
 dónde se fueron
 tus golpes y maldiciones

¿Cómo es saborear
 semillas de mesquite
 y plantar sin maceta?

y tu silencio
 tal vez encontró
 a otro hijo

and whispers
 {mamá, vero, jr, yvonne}.

“¿Recuerdas a papá?”

“He's just like papá.”

Mamá

pienso tanto en ti
y los desayunos rasquaches

{ un huevo,
cuchara de frijoles,
lechuga para ensalada,
y postre de jícama }

pienso tanto en ti
que nunca digo cuando me voy

{ noches por la ventana
pasando casas quemadas
a lujuria y lago }

nunca digo cuando me voy
para que no te preocupes

si un día no regreso,
tampoco debes preocuparte.

construction

the trowel
my father's
palette

scraping
cement
and plaster

sliding
on grit
sealing

a smooth
tomb
of broken

bottles
covering
wounds

grey hair
encased
in cheap amber

víboras

on dad's
heat-driven
madness days

jr. and i
squatted
in a hollow
pond

we strung
garter snakes
pierced on
mesquite twigs

waiting for
our mother's
resurfacing

Abuelita

my grandmother is like yours
 cliché driven monster
 looking to fill her snake
 and chicken quota

in between
 cuentos
 about the ranchito,
 sweeping dirt floors con palmas
 selling cliché chiclets
 con los niños en Las Cumbres, Reynosa, Tamaulipas, México
 struggling to forget
 random spousal beatings

my grandmother is
 sixty five years of
 blue skies and floods

when we buy tortillas
 hecho a máquina y plastic
 my grandmother is like yours

my grandmother is
 like yours
 wrinkled, uncared for, unskilled
 holding to
 her respirator
 talking about snakes
 the icon
 of the ranchito
 lost in the state
 of Aguascalientes, México

Our grandmother
 talks about
 clipping mesquite
 seeds
 sucking sweet
 green
 to pass time.

Regresando from the Midwest

My mother always retells the same stories lately. Her favorite is when she, my dad, and our tío and tía were returning from Iowa. Each time the story is told for a different reason. This time she's telling me because my 17 year old brother is about to buy a car del año. She's telling us of the long trip coming down con Jr., Yvonne, y Vero recién nacida traveling in the truck my dad bought for \$200 dollars. My dad heard a thumping noise and asked my mom to check the tire while he drove a little bit to see where the noise was coming from. Imagine, he asked my mom and not my tío. Pues, she did, and es que las tuercas no estaban bien puestas en una de las llantas. Reflecting, at the moment, my mom says "lo bueno es que lo encontramos" between the hidden context of

male dominance
migrant story, cross
cultural story, she
narrows it
down to
tuercas
en una
llanta
chueca.

blank

vida: leaning on a pole
 rusted y cansado
 en la pulga, after the cross
 through Anzaldúas subdued

blank

on the curb of salvation
 army, me pides una peseta
 “¿de dónde eres?”
 de allá. te doy la peseta.

blank

fishing man
 this side of the Americas
 gathering his Talapias
 and swimming back home

blank

from mildew park benches
 avoiding blue patrol lights
 sleeping in the dragging
 night

blank

I see you.
 uprooted and implanted
 far from *allá*
 arid and bare pescados.

Un poco de you

when you went to Donna ISD, they barred all the chiquillos en kinder from speaking Spanish but los activistas won and there was no more punishment for speaking with one more tongue. the loss is ours now as you teach your daughters more English so they can fit in where 90% of us are brown(ish). You want tus niños to fit in, like you didn't [it wasn't just about the paddle when you spoke Spanish; it was about being labeled Mexican-uneducated-una chiquilla mocosa y estúpida]. and los malos have won because tu hija can speak Spanish at school now, but when she speaks, it's crooked, unlike everybody else's. and now she dislikes those who speak Spanish because she feels alienated. they allow Spanish, but now it's for people who just crossed over. it means you haven't been here long enough.

so who won?

los malos made Spanish into a course,
 [about who you'll never be]
 developed French
 [funded and exotic]
 because football is the American way
 [not futbol]
 and Texas is crazy about turning you

into a güerita
 you taught your daughters well
 to lay a thick foundation
 on their cheeks
 cover lunares
 and how to avoid shame

Loaded

melissa lies
plump
caressing
her motherhood
stifled and hot
thighs cold
against block walls
melissa waits
for a resurrection

on a mattress
drunk passion
gasps for romance
and relishes
a familiarity
of burning
the body
a single bedroom
apartment
melissa's plump
child savoring
chocolate dripping
on his belly

Para olvidarnos

abuela stories exist
 as archetypes
 pelos sueltos
 always there
 para cuidar
 her children,
 y los niños de sus niños

who won't look
 at her eyes on the ojos
 de abuelo posing in a photo
 (con la otra mujer)
 my mother still keeps.
 but i do not ask

if grandmothers
 are immaculate

which hurts more?
 Que le quite el cheque
 a su hija
 o cuando grita

¡bájate! ¡ bájate!
¿Quieres que te arregle?

abuelita disowns a son
 for marrying a Mexicana,
 like she once was

a harvester
 whose husband
 enjoyed being Johnny Appleseed
 con mujeres de la patria

estas historias
 in the name of 'buelitas
 para no recordar abuelos

BARRIO-COLONIA

Path

Canal along the street
hides behind trees and never speaks
Road for things unseen

En Alton

middle America's
auburn street
slopes
into 5 mile line

drywall casas
wading in
WIC
liquor
pawn
shop

Esquina Mart's
individual
10¢ cigarettes

for kids
through canal
pathways

sifting
bottles, shattered
fences

and into
Main Street
America

Safety

lo que necesito es
 cruzarme-
 reassurance
 the sky is not falling
 and I'm ascending
 to heaven
 a familiar colonia,
 parvo dogs,
 and paint scrawled walls

un cielo
 where comfort
 es un tipo de barrio-colonia love
 tus amores con mis celos
 gritos sin golpes

un colonia love
 que apenas cruzo
 y duerme
 en caliche y colchones

y mi barrio love
 is up for grabs.
 tag it
 or break into it,
 give it a fist fight
 for expression.

Pero mi comfort –
 like my love –
 resembles
 mobile home lies
 creeping into niños
 watching su padre
 in a crazy carro
 doing doughnuts
 screaming caliche
 and paternity test.

Un mix de historia

i met caperucita roja
con sus tasty
pásteles, a clean
cut niña
going to abuela's house.

esa niña roja
unaware of a dancing
devil en el baile,
hoof steps waking
borrachos.

y la lechuza,
perched on a huisache
screeching at love
making silhouettes.

cuidado, little red
riding hood.
do not dance
with the handsome stranger
do not steal
your neighbor's husband.

Six colonia words

When I say brown,
 think of rhythmic flows
 filling these colonia
 houses on the hill, like birds
 in smoke from a blunt when she puffs
 when I say I see

boundaries, intertwined by a river to the sea
 that goes within my eyes, low and brown
 filling her puffs
 of pale rocks/dark fisherman flows
 by drowning birds
 filling this colonia

she rides on torn sheets from colonia
 dumpsters. sounds from a sea
 of screaming, begging birds
 like the pounding of his brown
 fist through air flows
 and pinches her puffs.

my friends does puffs.
 she says a night on the colonia
 really lets us feel the flows
 the catfish would feel if in the sea
 of brown inside the brown
 all the way down to the birds

black birds, grey birds, just birds
 all from one's puffs
 of cotton turned into brown
 spots of water on colonia
 dirt roads changing to a sea
 where kids put plywood bits to flow

using the same word flows
 the air gives to mockingbirds
 and sounds to my sea
 making me dream of puffs
 in my trailer home colonia
 to this charco of brown

forms miniature seas seeping below rigid flows of dirt

into brown potting soil for pajaritos on tripping wires
to feast on as they puff and climb down along colonia air

No me escondo

I could be in the backyard,
 en el cuartito
 pero i'm igual
 que los vecinos'
 fajitas y pollo en la parilla
 in the front yard
 y otros put a hammock on the elm.
 otra washes a VW
 y le sube al volumen hasta cuando
 se oiga lo mínimo de tres casas

Ramon Ayala canta
para poder llegar a ti
es todo tan difícil

estar aquí
 los maleas comiéndose la calle
 con golpes
 a un policía, por mujer

que le roban
 después que los regalos
 lleguen a la casa.

es difícil llegar
 pero cuando estás
 ya no te vas.

nos hacemos
 perros guardianes

we become less of a back-
 yard gente.

despertando con cada rumbo
 de gritos

saturday night
 parties de conjunto
 con el sonido de los bukis
 entre mis piernas

mientras los caminos atrás
 de la casa

son los caminos
de los colores
de los bandidos
escolares que dicen
una persona es gastada
en libros de inquietud
aunque los colores nos siguen
hasta enterrarlos en tus campos.
tus colores dicen lo que escuchamos
entre nuestro pecho

Fiesta para dos

The neighbors cook out
and feed the dogs, bones
they give them a sensation
of being human
the way we
walk towards each
other – we step
and we dance
follow the chairs,
empty seats,
and admire
a dragonfly
from a nymph
una chica
a quinceañera
and we share a cup –
151 rum con mentiras
of where we once were

there was almost an incident
when the small pickup truck
was a gust of dirt and force
and the gritos
pushed us indoors
there was almost a time I fell
out of love
a place
where I worked my bones
into words
filling my mouth
like lips.

Summer

Heat changes people.
We become brown,
darker than what we are.

And angry –
not souls,
just from the burn.

On our backs
we are imprinted
by our clothe
our burdens.

We are summer people.
We live here
in the heat.

Boom Town

from father's porch
and city
on the grow, providing workers
services, anything
for the goal, the entity, that first
class ride to upper lower
class, from the poverty
WIC lines and grabbing of
indigenous alien
cracker barrel philosophy
linen towels
picking the thorn
and throwing it back to the bush
so that more dirt than pavement
street of shoeless children
and pamper tax break
stops being a way of life
so terrible enough to inspire
a bottle of cheap Puerto Rican rum
mixed with thrift store cola.

Citrus Parade

on the edge
of border
creationism, children
bailan Tlacolorerosis.
and i am
myth
beaten by the sun
and a dog chain.

my mother overheard
two güeros saying
“Been to Progreso?”
“It’s like not a damn Mexican there
knows how to finish concrete”

and I stood
watching Mission High ROTC
march
hands clapping
pride and eyes
of Missouri
loving every frame of
cheerleaders
citrus
festival
cold.

toxic rain only in alton

I know it was wrong
stealing your intimate object
but I'll ask my sister
to give back your husband.

once you get him,
tell me a story
about a stem cell
dividing into two
then more pairs
breaking up into tissues and organs
monitoring themselves –
check and balance
deciding what we think and how it's done.
because we don't have credentials,
money wrapped in pockets
of city cop looking for a bust

according to the news
everything is in alton
even 24 miles from here, it happens in alton.

tell me why a grackle falls silent
when the lawn is wet
a bird's comedic timing
of teardrop eyes closing
to target practice
bottles breaking on canal depths
spreading glass diatoms
into water burning from lead
faded into manmade ponds
drying in the summer.

lead-drops on barrio-colonia species
tacuaches hiding under a trailer home
Kantunil y Linares streets
the entirety of the esposos
y salvavidas
en la alberca
 contando cabezas
 de cabello café, negro
café, negro, café

y vigilando esa
cabeza güera
como muñeca consumada
por café y negro

In alton también

viejitos
 like jóvenes
 caminan despacito
 a sus casitas

and their viejas
 [y la mía]
 jumping over
 chorizo oil

we [used to]
 go to mass
 at san martín de porres
 singing away confessions
 on top of hail mary's

[we do]
 dance into sin
 en la pulga

shifting between
 expired merchandise
 and damaged goods

a plastic horse missing a leg
 Jorge con su cojera
 Barbie, minus su ropa
 y Rita, too dark

for a good lay

sylvia vela park

is for gorditos
 caminando
 cada dia
 la güera con su hijo
 kids that come over
 if you stand with
 a basketball
 they wait
 for the rebound
 like alley cats
 do you choo them away
 or let them take up
 your time.

it's even for wannabe
 lovebirds
 scribbling
 names,
 never into eternity

soccer kids
 softball tots

rip up
 splinters

dive onto their
 bellyful of rocks

three hundred
 sixty one
 days

y los viejitos
 todavía se conocen
 aquí, escondidos
 con una sancha.

les platican del
 parque, que en
 la noche se convierte
 en la isla del padre.

y los niños corren

agosto.
déjelos que se cansen
para que duerman
tranquilos.

para que mi dedos
acaricien tus
vicios.

Esas dos millas

the census says
my town is 4,306 dots
of pobreza
4 mile line to 6 mile line,
one mile east to west.

y que de mi cuñado
a citizen –
after the census –
but still
and the priest in
San Martín de Porres
listen, kneels, prays
for more than 4 thousand.

poor Catholics go to San Martín,
even the ones who live closer to
our Lady of Guadalupe, porque
aquí you can get un desayuno
of two tacos for \$1
American.

past 6 mile line,
girls like Inez, still attended
Alton Elementary, even if she didn't
live in Alton.

your pencil
lines are boundaries
my boundary es la calle
del taco –
la esquina donde ese señor
vende sandías
[sin semillas]
and the pavement
leads to caliche

boundaries for all of us,
because passing la pulga
we are in the census,
checked, evaluated,
scratched off.

~~don't count this Martinez~~

~~ese Hernandez~~

and for my niece, esa panadería,
la Esquina Mart, esas dos millas
they are the world to her.
y así es para mí.

Querida Valle

– *after Rigo Tovar*

en este lado de la frontera
brincamos para la cumbia,
banda, internacional, techno

en la pulga de San Juan
con las señoras maduras
vigilando las jóvenes

y no nos vamos
hasta que ahogamos
las penas

hasta cuando la banda
anima que agarren
su última bebida
y baile.

querida amor
siempre regresaré
y bailaré un huapango
querida valle

MEXCLADO

New Orleans street jazz

under drizzle, makes me tear
hearing tu llanto.

Lucent

The lights flashed out
I daydreamed about
sinister alley ways
sprouting from
fields of oranges
of life
machismo
rising dawn
at twilight's tips.

I dreamt
of the valiente
a stench of overnight Presidente
purging from his body.

I wanted freedom

from my mother's
seven day work week
cleaning homes
because she's better than that –
to some
I wanted freedom,
like my dad,
fajazos beating my mom,
slipping out a locked door

and I wonder
if some days my father
cries out of frustration –
as I do –
to be understood.

en el baile de mi prima

nos encontramos
en círculos de diablos
tú, invisible
a los ojos de patrones
las garras escarbando
mi piel

reconoces
mis pasos
y a veces
espero que te miraré
en mi pasillo.

a medianoche
el viento inspira
tus gritos

“eres viejo
casado,
monstruo con máscara
de fantasma”

y respondo
“eres lechuza”

esa curandera

cúrame del malo
 burdening mi corazón
cúrame de borrachadas
que defina cada fin
de semana
y gritos frightening dogs
into alarma

place a red cloth
sobre mi cuerpo
 read the dark
lines of my life
 y cura
la manera de mi amor.

dame poder
to deflect gritos
de puto e infiel

dame poder
to forgive myself
cúrame de este amor
que casi me deja.

comezón

has me
cruzando los pies
like un hijo
de dios
pidiendo perdón

que comezón
en mis piernas
en el ombligo
even my own
corazón
dice basta!

sí –
i don't deny it –
el cuerpo rechaza
el desconocido
igual que el corazón
dice
no seas callada
don't look away
no te vayas

consume mi
piel café
my sangre
de mex
i is yo
can es puede

entre
dedos
on our hands
heart
en nuestro cuerpo

déjame
sin este comezón
corazón

In the fields

I take lovers
to bite on lushness –
a sweet-sour mist
at ripeness

gaps and loves
flashback

to Richard's
run, go, run
with stolen citrus

and torn stems
clinging
a bitter fear
the mud
to my escape

i park
grasping now
sweet-sour
plush

crashing.
the slit
of a window
urging me.

Listening

within vowels
desperate
clings of throwback
nights
drip on the back
of my cheek
and speak as
they travel down
creating goose bumps
and hunger pains

the sounds
climb over each other
toppling to fit
into your partially
open mouth

Bilingual

If you speak to me in Spanish, why
do I care for you more? Why do
your words explode sentiment?
Because of the possibilities,
because of shared experiences? Am I
foolish to love your Spanish, to read
those texts yet translated? Do I
love your language whether it is scholarly,
or colloquial? Does it matter if you
are from Nicaragua, always speaking inglés
with an accent? Does it matter that traditions
don't have to die?

succession

it's like the baby comes first
then maybe if you're a good
baby's momma I'll hand you
a ring so you can show it
off to your family, and your
father always wants to play
the lottery so he has me to
pick his numbers cuz he thinks
I'm lucky I don't ever marry
you because I'm just like those
stupid kids. I fuck before I know
fuck before I say Mary, Mary
Marry me, so I know you're mine.
marry me because I can't take
the way my father punches my mother.
mary, oh my friends are gone
into the abandoned house
and I want to follow them.
they like to feed themselves
to the whitewall canvas.
they feed themselves
to hands on caliche.
and I say, oh mary
mary, madre mia.

hijo de tu

pachuco padre,
 holding up paredes
 con el pie derecho
 the tip of his cigarrillo,
 breaking a fog

es un vato
 mandando su hijo
 a la chingada,
 the land of
 brown bag lunches.

only hijos de pachucos
 cross through Housing,
 and blessings de la Virgen,
 pasando familias
 depositing faith
 into their marinito

“échale ganas”
 “pon atención”
 “para que salgas adelante”

little piggy
 a bit light-skinned
 and rose-cheeked
 en su uniform
 colored with traces
 de pachuco
 y pocho.

roots

When cutting
south texas
huisache,
a tar-
covered stump
eliminates
buried, hacked
and chopped ancestors
from returning as
hungry offshoots

las cruces

wooden markers
grounded in
caliche y coronas
de cristo

cruces
dwindling as i
move north. Cruces para
Fernando y Michaela Torres

pero las cruces para ti
de Saúl
 están escondidas
y Gabriel,
 entre las yerbas

no se miran,
o tal vez nunca existieron.

en recuerdo
i didn't go
to your funeral
i didn't mourn
and sometimes i still expect to run into you
picking up some barbacoa en Jr's.

y no tengo una cruz
pero sí tengo lágrimas
that we won't ever
ride our bikes into the pond
of photos, snakes, y sunsets

y no tengo cruz
pero sí hay
gritos para ti

No se terminan

a border wall
 aplastando la tierra
 separating you from me
 me from them

a border patrol station
 in Falfurrias
 every trip we answer
 “Yes, sir” to
Are you a U.S citizen?
 Alton, Mission, Rio Grande Valley
 las tierras desgraciadas, to
Where are you coming from?
 “Yes, sir” to
Is this your car?

don't deport me
 like you did that stranger
 years ago –
 yesterday.
 don't pull me over
 like you do
 mi hermano,
 prieto.

a border's mentality
 in San Anton
 dismissing
 Tlatilco fertility
 statuettes and
 some half
 brown skinned
 tourist.

Un wetback en San Antonio

Un wetback en San Antonio
me preguntó, *¿me tomas una foto?*
I search my vocabulary,
pero the easiest thing to say
es que *sí*.
Le tomé la foto con su
Polaroid camera
so he could tell his story
to someone, who turned out
to be su mujer
que lo está esperando en algún
rancho de México.
Nos dijo de su vieja
y que caminó desde el valle
a San Antonio.
I laugh inside
but I think that's how
the journey felt.
He's lucky to have found
some work in
las cocinas en San Antonio.
He's just wanting his family
to know how he is:
una Polaroid
en el parque.

Streetcars

are the safest ways to get around in New Orleans.
They move slowly enough so you can talk
yourself into a romantic image. but when
walking, when walking, you feel vulnerable
like the gutted buildings. you notice the homeless
don't have anywhere to go. The sign says
the park is closed for renovation,
but they do it to keep out the homeless.
Depending on the time of night,
you may feel at home, when tourists
travel by streetcar during midday.
or at night, when the immigrants
viajan, los que todavía tienen acento.

Lookers

is the type of place ten
dollars will buy your
waitress a drink.
what she does with
the drink is up to her
but before the drink
she walks with you
to the dance floor
baila cerca, cerca,
but not close enough
for you to notice her
belly, maybe pregnant.
go to Lookers
find the new trend
in immigration. Small
cantinas where construction
workers sit on fold-out
tables. They wear comfortable
clothes because the only
women are the waitresses.
They go to drink, play
pool, and to be with
someone like themselves.

Sounds

If we come for exotic jazz, then
what do we do when we walk into
the ghetto, looking for alcohol in a can,
running into morenos on their
porch steps, mother loud-talking
to their children. Is this the
jazz, a broken beat of trumpets
sitting outside the convenience store,
eyeing me stranger? or cajun accordions
wheezing their first breath.

tomate

¿y qué? when güeros become folk stories
 or equate to 5%, when I see las lomas de Rio Grande
 y no sé quién es culpable. Desde la isla, los caliches en Alton,
 McAllen clubs, brown no se conoce because you got prietos,
 bolillos, cafesitos, tanned y todos
 odian uno al otro porque unos parecen muy nacos
 otros fresas, es como una ensalada where cherry
 tomatoes envy the fall aesthetic of heirloom tomatoes
 in turn, heirlooms think Beefsteak tomatoes are sellouts
 cuz they are in hamburgers, pizzas, pretty much anything

regardless vienen del labor
 darker each year,
 but never enough to be wild
 come el que nomás no me cae,
 who says his ancestors are Aztec, where his name was *xitomatl*
 but now its *tomati*.

conquistadora

she came like a conquistadora
all güera, full of border
notions and old
west spirit: cheap mezcal,
gun battles, and poverty.

plunges her fingers
into ruby red toronjas
a jumble
of morning dew
and pesticides

if bubaloo's
white *VLR 13* tee
is a collage of
cholos and clocks
don't think
he's a gangsta
he's just a pubescent
chicano in the making.

teach for
barrio-shaded kids

and believe
i teach for the Américas

post colonial malinches*- after pocha catalana's painting of the same name*

say goodbye [and fuck you too]
 father y fajazos.
 padre enojado
 porque ella se fue
 and ingested educational
 poison
 in kaleidoscopic cells,

otras malinches del valle
 son más quietas
 and use a hummingbird
 tied in a string
 of red under
 a lover's pillow

malinches son hijas –
 traitors to la casa
 y reglas
 de un machismo
 mutado

at funerals
 ellas dig themselves
 feet first into caliche,
 4-chambered hearts adorning
 a pale awkwardness

returning to la frontera
 para ofrecer
 su liberación
 como testamento
 de una malinche
 moderna

un frontera pocho en san antonio

pregunta:

dónde está the no
license, fly by noche
taquerías, tex-mex buffet
piratas hawked by
chicas en
mini-faldas.

y

mom?
still paranoid
nunca se queda
sentada
quier hacer
to-
do

o

como encuentro
el chisme de un paletero
corn en un vaso
y midnight
raspas?

Respuesta:

¿Quién sabe?
But stop by
la alameda and market
square.
Tal vez encuentras
cacahuate japonés,
un gansito de chocolate
photos of Mexican
placas
pero aplácate
con las morenitas

and during lunch
in Milam Park
cierra tus ojos

y será como Reynosa,
español sin acentos
los carros alrededor
gritando tu nombre.

i had a sueño

en mi sueño
jay leno
was on my old 19'
black and white
curtains to say
buenas noches

pero i prefered
topo gigio
que me ponga
a la camita
con su rat dance.

y en vez de
la little mermaid
wanting to take me
under the sea,
con su acento Mexicana
el ratón vaquero dice
*What the heck is this house
for a manly Cowboy Mouse?*

Another year, una pregunta más

Aren't I an oxy-
stereotype,
un childless
chicano.

it's not just
the marriage clock
counting the months

soy yo
contando las ramas
del huisache

shading
el carro, sobrinos,
ese gato vagabundo

que una noche
con su gata
me burla

Being a non-believer and Mexican American means

(only) attending mass
 in case of
 emergency weddings, quinceñeras
 and first born baptisms.
 It means a hundred pairs
 of crossed fingers
 in the name of

the father
 holy and spirit
 son

a non-believer
 kneels and holds back
 hands –
 the repetition
 of my sister's wish,
 mom's.

it means curanderos,
 power derived from dios,
 are deaf and mute.

it means promesas,
 in the name of el padre,
 and in death.

for a non-believer
 la Virgen de Guadalupe
 will never appear

palm sunday
 ash wednesday
 good friday

to be godless
 almost means
 not being Chicano

Pocho Questions

why can't I roll my r's when Andrea la güera can?

¿y por qué Tesalónica se convirtió en Tessy?

when did the pulga become ghetto?

were you always that brown?

how do i sound when i speak español?

quinceañeras, baptisms and weddings count as attending church?

si me voy, can i come back?

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Isaac Chavarría earned a Bachelors of Science in Biology from the University of Texas-Pan American in 2001. He has previously worked at UTPA as a writing center tutor, biology lab assistant, and sports editor for *The Pan American*. His current degree is a Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing, awarded from the University of Texas-Pan American in 2010.

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